

From *Truth to Time*: Soviet Central Television, 1957-1985

By

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Abstract

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The Brezhnev era (1964-1982) was also the era of television. The First Channel of Moscow's Central Television Studio began to reach all eleven Soviet time zones in the same years, 1965-1970, that marked the beginning of a new political era, the period of decline, corruption, and cynicism, but also stability, relative prosperity, and vibrant popular culture, that came to be called, retrospectively, the "era of stagnation." Nearly all of the iconic images and sounds of this period were mediated by television: Brezhnev's slurred speech and corpse-like appearance, the singing of Iosif Kobzon and Alla Pugacheva, the parades and funerals on Red Square, and Olympic figure skating, to name just a few. Quotations and jokes drawn from specific TV movies and shows are ubiquitous in post-Soviet memoirs and the press. Most strikingly, several of the most important programs created during the 1960s and 1970s are still a prominent part of current Russian television.

This dissertation analyzes the political and ideological dilemmas of the Brezhnev era through the lens of television, the medium with which that era is so closely associated. Seen from the perspective of its most famous television programs and their producers, Brezhnev-era cultural life appears far more fluid, experimental, and innovative than the binary categories of "official" and "unofficial" culture suggest, helping to explain the powerful nostalgia for precisely the "official" mass culture of this period in Russia today. Two changes in post-Stalin Soviet politics combined to encourage this experimentation. The first was the growing importance, after Stalin's death, of persuasion, rather than coercion, in mobilizing the Soviet population, as well as the eagerness of a reinvigorated intelligentsia to participate in revitalizing the socialist project during the 1960s. The second key factor was intense pressure from Cold War competition with the West. In order to respond to foreign radio broadcasting and offer an appealing Soviet alternative to the Western popular culture that was penetrating Soviet borders, the Communist Party leadership encouraged Central Television's staff to seek new styles and genres of television broadcasting. Far from being ritualized or formalized, therefore, some of the most popular and politically important programs on Central Television during the Brezhnev era were the site of significant cultural and political play. This experimentation began in the late 1950s, but it continued and in fact went further after 1968. At the height of the era of "stagnation," a key group of television programs were involved in a search for new ways of engaging and uniting the Soviet population in

an unfamiliar ideological environment: one in which the universality of enthusiasm and participation in a common mission were no longer assumed, and that was focused primarily on the present, not the future.

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I have a TV, give me the lectern
I will holler so that it carries for miles
It's not a window—I wouldn't even spit out of a window
It's as if they broke me a door to the whole world

Everything delivered, the very widest selection
Vacations in the Crimea, a hurricane, and Kobzon
A movie, part seven—that could be the fix
I didn't see the previous six

I turn on Channel 1—there's some diving
Well, that's OK, but starting at eight
“Let's Go, Girls!”—what will they come up with!
They're all in aprons—you could lose your mind!¹

--Vladimir Vysotsky, “Victim of Television,” 1972

Introduction: Television and Stagnation

In April, 1965, a television viewer named P. K. Pakhomova from Kharkov *oblast'* wrote a letter to Central Television about her favorite television program, a quiz and comedy show called *Club of the Merry and Resourceful* [*Klub veselykh i nakhodchivkh* or “*KVN*”]. “When you watch *KVN*,” she wrote, “you try to answer all the questions, and that means you try to read more, to learn more about everything. Everything around you sort of takes on a new meaning.... My wish,” she concluded, “is for *KVN* to never cease to exist [*chtoby “KVN” nikogda ne perestal sushchestvovat’*].” P. K. Pakhomova got her wish, but in a way that was unimaginable in 1965. *KVN*, one of the most popular shows ever produced by Soviet Central Television, is indeed still on the air and very popular in 2010—it has not ceased to exist. But the revolutionary socialist state that created the show has. Pakhomova’s letter reflects a central paradox of late Soviet life. Since 1917, the Soviet Communist Party had sought to produce a culture that would enlighten its citizens and transform their perception of the world around them, just as Pakhomova described. By the 1960s and 1970s, it had succeeded, creating an enormously popular mass culture that was also designed to enlighten and mobilize the Soviet population. Delivering this vibrant mass culture was a compelling and wildly popular new medium, television. Yet the most popular programs on Central Television—those that were regarded as Central Television’s greatest successes by audiences and the Communist Party Central Committee alike—have long outlasted the Soviet Communist Party whose most important messages they were ostensibly designed to convey. Their main meanings and formal qualities were both ideally suited to the late Soviet state’s political and ideological dilemmas, and largely independent from the Marxist-Leninist ideology that collapsed or was abandoned in 1991, along with much of the multi-national Soviet empire.

¹ Official site of the V. S. Vysotsky Fund, <http://www.kulichki.com/vv/pesni/est-televizor-podajte-tribunu.html>

This dissertation explores that paradox by looking at the Brezhnev era (1964-1982) through the lens of its most important and emblematic medium, television. It asks some very simple questions about the content and production of Soviet Central Television, the Soviet Union's national television network. What was Soviet television, without ads, without ratings, and without profit motives? What was on, and why, and how was it different from television in the "capitalist" world? Most importantly, it asks what Soviet TV shows can tell us about cultural and political life in the Brezhnev era, which came to be called, after 1985, the "era of stagnation."

The period of time and the medium share their beginnings: television gained a mass audience and was remade into a centralized, national broadcasting system during the same tumultuous years, 1965-1970, that defined the beginning of a new political era.² From 1965, the year in which the writers Yulii Daniel and Andrei Siniavsky were arrested for publishing their work abroad, to 1970, the number of television sets per Soviet family doubled, from roughly one set per four families, to one set per two families; this still modest number conceals much greater saturation in urban areas where television signals could be received consistently.³ On November 4, 1967, the powerful new Ostankino Television Center began to broadcast the signal of Moscow's Central Television Studio to a rapidly growing network of stations connected by cable lines and radio relay towers; two days before, the Soviet Union had commenced television broadcasting by satellite, bringing Central Television's First Channel to the Far North, Siberia, the Far East, and Central Asia.⁴ By 1970, roughly 70% of Soviet territory could receive Moscow's television signal.⁵ Among the shows these new Central Television viewers could watch was the iconic Soviet news program, *Time* [*Vremia*], first broadcast on January 1, 1968. By 1970, *Time* was beginning to challenge the Party's central newspaper *Truth* [*Pravda*] as the country's primary news source, by at least one measure: under pressure from the fast pace of news delivery achieved by foreign radio broadcasters, *Vremia* gained the right to broadcast stories before they appeared in *Pravda*.⁶

This shift from *Truth* to *Time*, from printed word to televisual image as the premier medium for Soviet culture and propaganda, would seem to fit very comfortably

² See Kristin Roth-Ey's excellent account of the spread of television technology and its initially ambivalent reception in the Soviet Union from 1950 to 1970 in Kristin Roth-Ey, "Finding a Home for Television in the USSR, 1950-1970," *Slavic Review*, Vol. 66, No. 2 (Summer, 2007): 278-306. See also Ellen Propper Mickiewicz, *Media and the Russian Public* (New York: Praeger, 1981), 18-19.

³ In 1965 there were 24 television sets per 100 families in the Soviet Union; by 1970, there was one set for every two families, or about 35 million sets total. By 1975, there were over 55 million television sets in the Soviet Union with another 6.5 million being produced annually. See Miasoedov, B.A. *Strana Chitaet, Slushaet, Smotrit (statisticheskii obzor)*, Statistika dlia vsekh series (Moscow: Finances and Statistics, 1982), 64, 70; Mickiewicz, *Media and the Russian Public*, 18-19.

⁴ "Sobytie i daty," Virtual'nyi Muzei Televideniia i Radio, www.tvmuseum.ru, http://www.tvmuseum.ru/catalog.asp?ob_no=17 (Last accessed April 20, 2010)

⁵ Kristin Roth-Ey, "Mass Media and the Re-making of Soviet Culture, 1950s-1960s" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Princeton University, 2003), 266.

⁶ There was a marked shift after 1970 from seeing television news as a sort of teaser that would stimulate viewers to seek out more in-depth coverage in the print media, to calling for it to be a self-sufficient news source. See TsAOPIM f. 2930 op. 1 d. 1105 l. 38-39; N. Biriukov, "Teleinformatsiya. Nastoishchchee i budushchchee," *Televidenie i radioveshchanie* No. 11 (November, 1970), 10. On the ways Soviet citizens chose among different media for different purposes, see Mickiewicz, *Media and the Russian Public*, 41-50.

with well-worn stories about the nature of the transition from “thaw” to “stagnation” and about television as a medium for totalitarian political spectacle and mind-numbing entertainments designed to suffocate dissent. Television was the most closely censored Soviet medium, and its expansion in the 1960s and 1970s offered the Kremlin a uniquely absorbing medium that reached right into Soviet living rooms.⁷ As Alexei Yurchak has observed, popular and historical accounts of the Brezhnev era have long been structured by a series of binaries, which portray late Soviet society as sharply divided between a ritualized, oppressive, and grey public sphere and a vibrant private world of guitar poetry played in kitchens and the circulation of underground texts and musical recordings.⁸ From this perspective, it is easy to ignore television entirely or reflexively assign it to the “official” side of Soviet life, where it is assumed to require little further examination, given the formalization of public ideological language and rituals during the 1970s. Several excellent studies of Soviet culture have argued that television, like other forms of Soviet “mass culture,” is important because, unlike censored or privately circulated literature and limited release artistic films, television, popular genre movies, and official pop music were consumed by millions of Soviet citizens.⁹ While this is certainly an essential point, this argument has the effect of setting mass culture apart from other cultural fields, in which, it is implied, more rarefied ideological and philosophical questions were being addressed.¹⁰

⁷ Radio, of course, also reached right into Soviet living rooms, but television was different in two important ways. First, Soviet audience studies suggested that radio listening was often a secondary activity—listening took place while the listener was engaged in other activities, like housework; television viewing was much more attentive. Second, unlike radio, television was largely invulnerable to foreign broadcasting services (with the important exception of border regions, where Soviet citizens could watch foreign television broadcasts). On radio listening habits see Ellen Mickiewicz, *Split Signals: Television and Politics in the Soviet Union* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 19. On television’s significance to the Soviet state because of its relative invulnerability to enemy broadcasting see Roth-Ey, “Mass Media,” 250-260. On border zones in which Soviet citizens *could* watch foreign television broadcasts, see Amir Weiner, “Déjà vu all over again: Prague Spring, Romanian Summer, and Soviet Autumn on the Soviet Western Frontier,” *Journal of Contemporary European History*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (June 2006): 159-94.

⁸ Alexei Yurchak, *Everything was Forever Until it Was No More: the Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 4-8.

⁹ By “mass culture” I mean the films, music, literature, and other cultural products that were distributed through state-controlled venues and media. Following Richard Stites, however, I see these Soviet cultural products as belonging to the category of popular culture as well. See Richard Stites, *Russian Popular Culture: Entertainment and Society since 1900* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 1992), 1-4. In this dissertation I use “mass” and “popular” interchangeably to describe these cultural products.

¹⁰ This is not an argument generally made by scholars of popular culture themselves, of course, but rather an example of the continued strength of prejudices against the study of “low” and “mass” forms of culture, among which television is usually regarded as the bottom of the heap. Many excellent studies of Russian popular culture, which have focused predominantly on the Stalin era, have demonstrated the centrality of mass culture to the most important political and ideological changes in Soviet political and cultural life. See Stites, *Russian Popular Culture*; Denise Youngblood, *Movies for the Masses: Popular cinema and Soviet society in the 1920s* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992); James von Geldern’s introduction to von Geldern and Stites, eds, *Mass Culture in Soviet Russia: Tales, Poems, Songs, Movies, Plays and Folklore, 1917-1953* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995); Matthew Lenoe, *Closer to the Masses: Stalinist Culture, Social Revolution, and Soviet Newspapers* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004); and David MacFadyen, *Songs for Fat People: Affect, Emotion, and Celebrity in the Russian Popular Song, 1900-1955* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002) and *Red Stars: Personality and the Soviet Popular Song, 1955-1991* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001).

But Central Television's content and its role in late Soviet life were much more important and complicated than this story suggests. Central Television's programming was extraordinarily ambitious and eclectic. It included almost every genre of Soviet cultural production—film, music, journalism, theater, variety stage, circus, literature, sport, lectures on Marxism-Leninism, and advice about how to style your hair. Quite a few of Central Television's writers, directors, editors, and critics saw television's content, not only during the 1960s, but on into the 70s and 80s, as a continuation of the artistic traditions of the revolutionary avant-garde. Television's influence was also felt in all of these fields: "Victim of Television," excerpted above, was not the only song that the actor, guitar poet, and cult figure Vladimir Vysotsky wrote about Soviet TV shows. Most spheres of Soviet everyday life and culture in the 1970s—low culture but also high, "official" but also "unofficial"—were saturated with language, imagery, and dramatic forms drawn from television, which had, in turn, drawn them from somewhere else. Television transgressed most of the dichotomies described above in a single evening.

The central role that television plays in post-Soviet memories of the Brezhnev era likewise suggests the centrality of television to this period and raises a number of important questions. Nearly all of the iconic images and sounds of this period were mediated by television: Brezhnev's slurred speech and corpselike appearance, the singing of Iosif Kobzon, Lev Leshchenko, and Alla Pugacheva, the parades and funerals on Red Square, Olympic figure skating, and the serial film *17 Moments of Spring*, to name just a few. Quotations and jokes drawn from specific TV movies and shows, or from the experience of watching television in the 1970s (including, for example, Brezhnev's famous mispronunciation of the word "*sistemicheskii* [systematic]" as "siski-masiski") are ubiquitous in post-Soviet memoirs and the press. The role of television as a locus for contemporary nostalgia for the Brezhnev era likewise cannot be overstated.¹¹ Many of the most famous programs of the 1970s have been issued on DVD for contemporary fans, but TV viewers in Russia today can also subscribe to the Nostalgia channel, which broadcasts Soviet television programming from the 1960s, 70s, and 80s around the clock. Like the Brezhnev era as a whole, therefore, Soviet television and its post-Soviet memory are structured by a number of paradoxes. Television was the most heavily censored, the most "official," Soviet medium, but it was also extraordinarily popular; it was experienced at the time, and has been remembered, as overbearing and dull but also charming, funny, and warm.

This dissertation offers a partial explanation of these contradictions, and a new view of the Soviet culture in the Brezhnev era. I argue that, far from being ritualized or formalized, some of the most popular and politically important programs on Central Television were the site of significant cultural play, experimentation, and innovation. This experimentation began during the Khrushchev era, as part of the broader search, among optimists and enthusiasts in journalism, science, and the arts, for new ways to engage the public, propose new leaders, and revitalize the revolutionary project.¹²

It did not stop, however, after 1968. Rather, it continued on, changed character,

¹¹ Svetlana Boym gives television a prominent place in her account of the "common places" of Soviet everyday life. Boym, *Common Places: Mythologies of everyday life in Russia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 121, 144, 150-151, 222, 239.

¹² For more on this search, see Vladislav Zubok, *Zhivago's Children: the Last Russian Intelligentsia* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), 121-160.

and in some ways went further. Brezhnev's decision to crush hopes for reform, while also abandoning appeals to millenarian enthusiasm, produced the disillusionment, melancholy, and corruption that accompanies the routinization of any faith.¹³ But it also opened up new challenges and new choices. A key group of television programs—the news, holiday, and game shows that are now the focus of significant post-Soviet nostalgia for the Brezhnev era—were involved, I argue, in a search for new ways of engaging and uniting the Soviet population in an unfamiliar ideological environment: one in which the universality of enthusiasm and participation in a common mission were no longer assumed, and that was focused primarily on the present, not the future.

Since the thaw, television had been at the center of the state's efforts to mobilize and please the Soviet population in a new post-Stalin, Cold War world in which persuasion replaced coercion as the primary lever of state power.¹⁴ In the socially fractured world of Soviet society after 1968, television was thus a natural place for playful experimentation with new rules of the game.¹⁵ On Central Television's high profile and enormously popular musical holiday programs and game shows, these new rules were strikingly procedural. Beginning in the early 1970s, a proliferation of television contests of talent and skill sought to unify the increasingly diverse and polarized Soviet television audience and negotiate its generational and political conflicts by making viewers into voters and judges, playfully establishing and challenging new authorities entitled to define winners and losers. In the 1970s these games were limited to the peripheral—but politically crucial—realms of consumption, taste, popular music, and working class identities.¹⁶ When political and economic reform was imposed from above after 1985, however, several of these shows quickly became very serious fora for political debate. They also revealed the ways in which Central Television staff had preserved and developed ideas, genres, and ambitions dating from the early 1960s through the mid 1980s, when they underwent a striking revival during Gorbachev's *perestroika*.

From “thaw” to “stagnation” on television

This dissertation begins not in 1968-70, but in the middle of the 1950s. As a result, it traces the evolution of Central Television's programming from one problematic metaphor to another: from “thaw” to “stagnation.” In his excellent recent book on the

¹³ Thanks to Yuri Slezkine, whose exploration of this understanding of the Soviet project during my time at Berkeley has been a great source of insight and inspiration.

¹⁴ For a discussion of the dilemmas entailed by the shifting balance between persuasion and coercion as a basis for mobilizing the Soviet population, see Polly Jones, “Introduction: the dilemmas of de-Stalinization,” in *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization. Negotiating Social and Cultural Change in the Khrushchev Era*, Polly Jones, Ed. BASEES/Routledge Series on Russian and Eastern European Studies (Oxford: Routledge, 2006), 1-18.

¹⁵ Elena Prokhorova's excellent dissertation on Soviet television serial films in the 1970s makes a related case about television programs as a site of the articulation of new collective and individual identities. Elena Prokhorova, “Fragmented Mythologies: Soviet TV Miniseries of the 1970s,” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 2003).

¹⁶ On the importance of gender, taste, and consumption as Cold War battlegrounds see for example Susan Reid, “Cold War in the Kitchen: Gender and the De-Stalinization of Consumer Taste in the Soviet Union under Khrushchev,” *Slavic Review*, vol. 61, no. 2 (Summer, 2002), 211-252; and Catriona Kelly, *Refining Russia: Advice Literature, Polite Culture, and Gender from Catherine to Yeltsin*, (Oxford, UK:Oxford University Press, 2001).

thaw in Moscow's Arbat neighborhood, Stephen Bittner describes the complex set of memories and biases that underlie the notion of a "thaw" period of liberalization under Khrushchev that ended somewhere between 1965 and 1968.¹⁷ As Bittner observes, this periodization depends on a very selective understanding of the nature of the thaw. For Russian nationalists within the intelligentsia, for example, the years *after* 1968 were a "thaw" and golden age. Recent scholarship on both postwar Stalinism and the Brezhnev era has also challenged the notion of a discrete thaw with a clear beginning and end.¹⁸ Bittner rightly emphasizes the unevenness and contradictory tendencies of the thaw; its rapid ideological changes unfolded at different paces in different institutions.

The particular case of Central Television offers a few additional insights into the transition between "thaw" and "stagnation." The first is the remarkable continuity in Central Television's staff's beliefs about television's formal qualities and its role in enlightening, unifying, and mobilizing Soviet citizens. An influential group of Central Television workers in the late 1950s and early 1960s, who have become the most prolific memoirists commemorating thaw television, saw themselves at the center of the reform-oriented thaw journalism led by Aleksei Adzhubei's *Izvestiia*.¹⁹ Television, a new medium for a new, post-Stalin era, was to transmit all of the thaw's most important qualities, especially sincerity and transparency. It was intended to identify and celebrate new socialist persons [*lichnosti*], replacing the singular personality of the Stalin cult.²⁰ These new model socialist persons were drawn primarily from the intelligentsia, and from among Central Television's own on-screen personnel. Like Bittner's architects who sought to rehabilitate Constructivism, Central Television staff drew on and rehabilitated the ideas of the theatrical and cinematic avant-gardes. They imagined themselves remaking Soviet society by giving viewers a new way of seeing themselves and their surroundings.

The most celebrated shows of these years, many of which were broadcast live, are remembered as part of a television "golden age" cut short, according to many memoir accounts, by the arrival of Sergei Georgievich Lapin as the head of Central Television in April, 1970.²¹ Lapin did sharply curtail the ambitions of television staff, particularly in the News division; he also pushed Central Television to address its programming to the less educated, provincial viewers that it had gained by the late 1960s. But the language and ambitions of the revolutionary avant-garde continued to be used to describe television's objectives, both in internal meetings and in print. Vladimir Sappak, a theatrical critic who linked television to the ideas of Dziga Vertov and defined it as live and unscripted, was quoted and mentioned by name in the 1969-1978 edition of the *Bol'shia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia*, long after live, unscripted television was only a memory. This continuity was enhanced by Central Television's revolving door for innovative writers and directors. Many careers were cut short by the firings that ensued

¹⁷ Stephen Bittner, *The Many Lives of Khrushchev's Thaw: Experience and Memory in Moscow's Arbat* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 1-13.

¹⁸ Ibid., 10-11.

¹⁹ See Zubok, 150-151; Thomas Wolfe, *Governing Soviet Journalism: the Press and the Socialist Person After Stalin* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005).

²⁰ Kristin Roth-Ey, "Mass Media," 351-354.

²¹ Kristin Roth-Ey, *Soviet Television in the Media Age* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, forthcoming), 337.

when Central Television's content angered the censors.²² Yet there were several prominent cases of television staff who were fired only to return to work on a consultant basis within a couple of years and who went on to make similarly boundary-pushing programs.²³

Bittner's observation that a selective focus on certain groups and reform movements has shaped the chronological definition of the thaw is also highly relevant to television. One of the most important and now widely recognized features of the thaw—Khrushchev's redefinition of the socialist future as a bounteous consumer society and emphasis on directing consumption—continued long after the end of the 1960s. Efforts to promote modern, economical, and tasteful “socialist” consumption during the Cold War continued and even expanded from the 1960s through the 1980s. The television broadcast of popular music is a similarly poor fit for the standard chronological framework of thaw and stagnation. As David MacFadyen has shown, Soviet popular music continued to articulate new models of Soviet personhood from the thaw through perestroika, with no sharp boundaries discernible between the late 1950s and the late 1980s, even as music evolved and varied due to individual contributions by particular stars.²⁴ Television also reverses the usual progression from openness to oppression: the musical sounds and performers included on Central Television's New Year's Eve concert programs in the late 1970s would have been unimaginable on Soviet television in the early 1960s, simply because the musical world beyond Soviet borders had changed so much. Soviet television holiday programs sought to unify the viewing audience; to do this in the late 1970s meant including a much broader range of musical styles.

The difficulty of establishing a clear endpoint for the thaw is not the only challenge the case of Central Television poses for the periodization of this era. It also raises serious questions about the validity of “stagnation” as a descriptor. As with the “thaw” metaphor, we have to be clear about what we mean when we identify the period from roughly 1968-1985 as an “era of stagnation.”

A (limited) defense of “stagnation”

The history of the term “stagnation” and its evolving and multiple meanings in both Western historiography and Russian political life have been described and evaluated in detail elsewhere, so I will limit myself to a very brief overview.²⁵ The term originated with Gorbachev, but Gorbachev himself seems to have meant multiple things by it, including the idea that Brezhnev's policies represented a return to Stalin's brutal,

²² This was particularly true during the years, from the 1950s through much of the 1960s, when most of Central Television's original programming was broadcast live. For several notorious cases, see Roth-Ey, “Mass Media,” 332-336.

²³ For example, Sergei Muratov, who was fired in 1957, returned as a consultant to create the extremely famous Soviet game show *KVN* in 1961; Vladimir Voroshilov, a theatrical director who began to create programs for the Youth Programming Desk [*Glavnaya redaktsiya molodezhi*] in 1969 and was fired in 1970 went on to write and direct two more high-profile programs for the Youth Desk, one in 1972 (canceled after a scandal in 1973), and another in 1975 that is still on the air today. See Chapter 5 of this dissertation for a discussion of these programs.

²⁴ See MacFadyen, *Red Stars*, 6-32.

²⁵ Edwin Bacon, “Reconsidering Brezhnev,” in *Brezhnev Reconsidered*, Edwin Bacon and Mark Sandle, eds, *Studies in Russian and Eastern European History and Society* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), 2; see also Yurchak, 4-8.

coercive use of state power and the assertion that, under Brezhnev, the Soviet leadership failed to respond to important social and technological changes in the world outside.²⁶ The term is also used to refer to the widespread cynicism, malaise, and corruption in Soviet life, in response to the state's failure to fulfill the expectations for better living conditions raised by victory in the Second World War and again by Khrushchev's millenarian claims about the arrival of communism in "the present generation's lifetime." Among loyal but critical intelligentsia elites this cynicism was furthered by the arrests of Siniavsky and Daniel and the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August, 1968, which crushed hopes of reform and led many to abandon belief in much of Marxism-Leninism, particularly the idea that the current Soviet state was moving toward communism.²⁷

The label "stagnation" has been attacked on a number of grounds: for being too intertwined with Gorbachev's agenda and Cold War politics to be of use to scholars in the present; for being constructed on the basis of a series of false dichotomies between, for example, official and unofficial; for failing to reflect the experiences of Soviet citizens either during the Brezhnev era or in retrospect, when the Brezhnev years are remembered as the most stable and prosperous period in Soviet history; and for papering over much of the real political, economic, and social change that inevitably takes place in the life of any country over the course of 20 years.²⁸ The boundaries of "stagnation" are also, like those of the thaw, quite uncertain—when did it begin and end? Were particular periods more "stagnant" than others, such as, for example, the years closer to the end of Brezhnev's life? The term "stagnation" has an unfortunate tendency to imply that nothing was happening at all in Soviet public life during this period of significant events in the Cold War, real shifts in the worlds of high politics and cultural policy, and broad social and economic changes.²⁹

Although "stagnation" effectively captures the very real sense of malaise, irony, and disillusionment of life in this period, it works least well as a descriptor of Soviet culture during this period. The claim that the Brezhnev years were a time of cultural, as well as economic, "stagnation" depends on the claim that all of the vibrant cultural life taking place in private apartments and other unsanctioned settings in the 1970s was exclusively "private" and "unofficial," completely cut off from public culture and state-controlled theaters and media.³⁰ It also requires the dismissal of a remarkably vibrant world of Soviet mass media, film, music, and published literature as "mere" entertainments with no meaningful connection to politics or high culture. In fact, as

²⁶ Bacon, 2.

²⁷ Zubok, 298-299.

²⁸ See Bacon, 4-6; Yurchak 4-8.

²⁹ See the other essays in *Brezhnev reconsidered* for analyses of "stagnation" in relation to political, international, economic, and social life in the period.

³⁰ As many scholars and memoirists have observed, the Soviet rock scene depended on the use of performance space, which was often controlled by local arts organizations, houses of culture, or the Komsomol, as well as toleration by the police. See Artemy Troitsky, *Back in the USSR: the True Story of Rock in Russia* (London: Omnibus Press, 1987), 33-34. See also Henry Reichman, "Soviet Rock Stars: Andrei Makarevich and Boris Grebenshchikov," paper presented at the panel "Of Cosmonauts, Athletes, and Rock Stars: Official Celebrity and Popular Celebrity in the USSR After Stalin" at the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, Boston, November 14, 2009. As Yurchak argues, the existence of this tolerated, even encouraged, but closely monitored space was typical of late Soviet culture. See Yurchak, 126-157.

numerous studies of late Soviet everyday life, film, and musical culture have shown, these boundaries were all quite porous. The thaw was a period of significant socialization and collaboration between educated elites in different artistic and professional fields, and dense social networks connected Central Television's staff with leading writers, actors, and others whose works were not always acceptable to the censors.³¹ Vladimir Vysotsky, for example, moved very freely between official and unofficial worlds: he was both a bard poet and a famous television actor.³² He had also been the roommate of one of the creators of the Central Television quiz and humor show *KVN* in the late 1950s.³³

Central Television staff did not leave their personal and intellectual connections at the door when they arrived at work. They had, since the thaw, drawn on a variety of Soviet artistic traditions and precedents from other arts and media. But even as the Central Committee began to exert more direct and detailed control over the content of their programs in the second half of the 1960s and especially after Lapin's arrival in 1970, Central Television staff were actively encouraged in their search for creative and popular new forms and genres. Indeed, the decision not to implement significant economic or administrative reforms after the late 1960s actually increased the importance of an innovative mass culture: it remained one of the few means of mobilizing the population, convincing them of the superiority of the Soviet "way of life" during the Cold War, and increasing economic production. "Stagnation," in Gorbachev's sense of failing to implement needed reforms, in one part of the Soviet state's affairs could serve as a spur to creativity in others.

This is not to say that there were not significant limits on the kinds of programming Central Television staff could create. As in the many other fields of Soviet life in which cultural innovation was both encouraged and intermittently repressed, Central Television's more creative shows lived with constant interference from the censors.³⁴ Soviet censorship was particularly focused on content, directing its repressive efforts toward circumscribing who could appear on air, as well as what they looked like, wore, and said, and on ensuring that information falling into the very broadly defined category of state secrets was not mentioned on air. There were harsh reprisals from the Central Committee for individual broadcasts that crossed the censors' line beginning in the mid 1950s, as well as broader pressure that began in the mid 1960s and culminated under Lapin in the 1970s, to reorient Central Television's programming toward a focus on worker, rather than intelligentsia, biographies.³⁵

³¹ Slava Gerovitch's study of Soviet cybernetics is a case in point. See Gerovitch, *From Newspeak to Cyberspeak: a History of Soviet Cybernetics* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002).

³² For more on Vysotsky's career, see Gerald Stanton Smith, *Songs to Seven Strings: Russian Guitar Poetry and Soviet "Mass Song"* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), 145-180.

³³ Elena Gal'perina, "KVN—Kak eto delalos," ili metamorfozy Kluba Veselykh i Nakhodchivkh," on www.tvmuseum.ru, http://www.tvmuseum.ru/catalog.asp?ob_no=8725 (last accessed April 29, 2010).

³⁴ See Yurchak, 126-157.

³⁵ On the consequences of slips on live air at Central Television in the 1950s, see Kristin Roth-Ey, "Mass Media," 334-336. On pressure to focus on workers after 1968, see Chapters 3 and 5 of this dissertation. It is impossible to be certain, without further research, but my sense is that consequences for problematic programs were substantially reduced during the Brezhnev era, something that mirrors Bittner's observation that convictions for anti-Soviet activities declined sharply in the Brezhnev era, compared with the late 1950s (679 between 1966 and 1970, versus 1,964 in 1957 alone), the ostensible height of the thaw. See Bittner, 11. This change was facilitated by the use of film and, later, videotape, rather than live

What is most striking about Central Television's programming, however, is how frequently television staff could draw on aspects of Soviet life that had no clear connection to Marxist-Leninist ideology, or at least had numerous other influences and implications. There were spectator and Olympic sports, pre-Revolutionary Russian culture, and the highly fluid world of variety stage and popular music, with its Western influences and pre-Revolutionary traditions. This relative abundance of genres and traditions that had little to do with Soviet ideology, but were entirely justifiable in their terms and occupied a fully legitimate, if problematic, place in Soviet life, was certainly not unique to the post-Stalin era. Yet their presence is worth stressing in a description of the Brezhnev era, since the latter is so often identified with the two poles of formalized authoritative discourse and private intelligentsia culture and dissidence. Although the amount of lively entertainment on Central Television was limited by the enlightening mission of Soviet media, its importance was also elevated during the Brezhnev era by Cold War competition with the West, the failure of economic reform, and the decline of belief in the truth of the state's promises.

At least two questions remain. Precisely what was the nature of the innovative programming I have referred to? And what, if any, conclusions can we draw from it about the relationship between television during the long, stable Brezhnev era and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991? Here my argument is quite specific, and it entails a partial defense of the conventional periodization of "stagnation" and one of its multiple meanings.

Between 1968 and 1970, two of the most popular and politically central program genres on Central Television—holiday musical programs and game shows, created by the Musical Programming Desk [*Glavnaia redaktsiia muzykal'nykh programm*] and the Youth Programming Desk [*Glavnaia redaktsiia programm dlia molodezhi*], respectively—underwent what might be called a procedural shift. Each of these genres had been, since the late 1950s, at the forefront of Central Television's efforts to demonstrate the superiority of Soviet youth and the Soviet way of life during the Cold War, and to convince viewers of this superiority by engaging them in defining norms of taste, consumption, and behavior. They were also entertainment programs, and viewers expected to enjoy them—to laugh, to see songs and performers that they liked. The right to pleasurable entertainment during leisure times had first been emphasized by Stalin in the mid-1930s, but was both more relevant and less dangerous to demand under Khrushchev, who shortened work hours and emphasized leisure time as one of the benefits of life in the superior Soviet system.³⁶ Given these contradictory objectives—to teach viewers proper tastes and meet their current ones—these shows faced related questions: how much input should Soviet citizens have in determining the kinds of entertainments they might enjoy after work or at the holidays? How could unequal access to privileges (like appearing on a game show) be justified or overcome? In the case of

broadcasting, but as some of the cases outlined in Chapter 5 of this dissertation suggest, some risky shows remained live, and the resulting firings were often very temporary.

³⁶ On the right to entertainment in the Stalin era, see for example Karen Petrone, *Life has Become More Joyous, Comrades: Celebrations in the Time of Stalin* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000); on Khrushchev's reduction of work hours and taxes see Zubok. 122-123; for an account of one of the most important leisure pastimes, spectator sports, from 1917 to 1991 see Robert Edelman, *Serious Fun: A History of Spectator Sports in the USSR* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

holiday musical programs, the central problem was the inclusion or exclusion of particular songs or acts from the concert lineup. Game shows faced similar problems regarding, first, the determination of who could be a contestant and, second, the selection of winners and losers, within the set of those who got on the show in the first place. Both of these programs dramatized important questions about authority in the post-Stalin Soviet state. Khrushchev's Secret Speech at the 20th Party Congress in 1956 had profoundly shaken the Party's authority by indicating that it could be wrong. In the wake of that admission, who should have the authority to determine winners and losers?

Questions of authority and privilege troubled Central Television staff and the television audience from the beginning of the 1960s through the 1980s. Before 1968, however, these debates were conducted off the air: they were the subject of thousands of viewer letters to Central Television, complaining about the selection of songs and winners, and about the rules of the game and the fairness of the judging. Central Television staff responded in print, in journal articles, and in books aimed at helping fans stage amateur versions of these popular shows in local schools, factories, and houses of culture. After 1968, however, Central Television created a series of new contest-based musical holiday programs and game shows that brought these questions directly onto the air and emphasized the connections between viewer input and the line-up of the concert or the winners of the contest. They did so, moreover, in a way that was strikingly procedural: they asked viewers and studio audiences to vote and described the mechanisms the show would use to determine winners on the basis of those votes. These musical contest programs and game shows took a variety of forms—some measured public opinion in the studio audience with special microphones that could capture applause; others asked viewers to write in to select one of three finalists; others displayed mountains of viewer mail and talked about what it had contained. All of these shows stopped short of holding the equivalent of a multi-candidate election on screen (although sometimes the censors had to intervene to prevent them), all limited the voters' choices, and all left room for the producers to determine the outcome without regard to the audience's votes. Yet by putting voting, juries, points, and rules at the center of their programs, they presented a picture of Soviet society in which conflict between different social and generational groups was the norm, and proposed novel ways of overcoming those conflicts—ways which made little reference to the guiding role of the Communist Party.³⁷

These very prominent contest programs of the 1970s were not unique to television; quite the opposite—they were typical of a broader proliferation of contests and competitions in Soviet schools, factories, and in other parts of Soviet leisure culture—notably spectator and Olympic sports, which had similar controversies about points, judging, and fair play. Indeed, like the flourishing alternative social worlds that Alexei Yurchak has described in late Soviet everyday life, Central Television in the 1970s saw a

³⁷ These programs' focus on contests, rules, and judging were not, of course, unique in the context of Soviet society—contests and competitions of every variety were the ubiquitous norm in everyday life in the Brezhnev era. But conversations about authority and audience feedback were uniquely explicit on Soviet contest programs because they focused on politicized spheres of everyday life, not high culture, and were created from whole cloth, without reference to international norms, as, for example, in chess, math, soccer, or figure skating competitions. See Chapter 5 of this dissertation for a more detailed discussion of Soviet game shows.

proliferation of programs that featured conflict, contests, and open-ended narratives. These shows offered a reflection of Soviet life that departed from that of Soviet ideology, while not seeming at the time to contradict it in any way. Television contests were perhaps uniquely pointed in their dramatization of authority and audience response, however, since television was so closely associated with the Kremlin. These games, created from whole cloth by their writers and directors, had to come up with spatial and temporal ways to represent the workings of power. Discussions about the nature of authority and the role of the public were at their most explicit. Should the jury be on the stage, next to the players? On a balcony above them? Should the audience at home be represented by stacks of mail or by an audience in the studio (and how should they be seated), or both? How often should the jury weigh in with information about points, and should they explain their rulings to the players? Could the latter ask questions or challenge decisions?

The answers to these questions changed over time, as these shows' producers and Central Television executives responded to viewer feedback and their own sense of how the shows could be made more entertaining, more effective, more engaging. Over the course of the 1970s, this group of contest-based programs in the Youth and Musical Programming Desks changed their rules, content, and ways of eliciting audience response very frequently, creating new contests-within-the-contest for subsets of viewers, to try to accommodate the tastes of the entire Soviet audience. The contemporary writings, interviews, and memoirs of these shows' producers suggest that, just like their predecessors in the 1960s, they experienced their time working on these shows at Central Television in the 1970s and early 80s as a time of excitement, creativity, and invention.³⁸ The fact that several of these programs continued to air not only through the 1980s, but also into the present suggest how they, like much else in Soviet life by the 1970s, were not dependent on the Marxist-Leninist ideology that collapsed in 1991.³⁹

I would like to suggest that the move toward dramatizing the process of reaching collective decisions on this handful of very popular game shows and holiday musical shows was a response to an important change in Central Television's political and ideological environment after 1968. That change fits with one, specific meaning of "stagnation": the sense that Soviet society had slowed its headlong rush toward a certain communist future, in part because to so many people that future no longer seemed

³⁸ Interview with Eduard Sagalaev, Moscow, 13 February 2007. For published accounts of working in the Youth Programming Desk, see for example, A.V. Men'shikov (a team captain on the program *Club of the Merry and Resourceful* [*Klub veselykh i nakhodchivkh*] in the late 1960s, who went on to work in the Youth Programming Desk during the 1970s), "Za Kadrom. Televizionnye baiki proshlogo veka," on www.tvmuseum.ru, http://www.tvmuseum.ru/catalog.asp?ob_no=10698 (last accessed April 29, 2010); "Interview with Anatolii Lysenko," www.tvmuseum.ru, http://www.tvmuseum.ru/catalog.asp?ob_no=10625. See also the collection of interviews with producers and players of the game show *What? Where? When? [Chto? Gde? Kogda?]* at <http://chgrk.tvigra.ru/library/> (last accessed April 29, 2010).

³⁹ Several very popular programs from the 1960s, likewise focusing on competition and/or social unity, also have continued to be broadcast with only minor breaks or continuously into the present. These include the game shows *Club of the Merry and Resourceful* [*Klub veselykh i nakhodchivkh*] (1961-1972, 1985-present); *What? Where? When? [Chto? Gde? Kogda?]* (1975-present) and the holiday musical programs *Little Blue Flame* [*Goluboi ogonek*] (1962-present) and *Song of the Year* [*Pesnia goda*] (1971-present).

certain.⁴⁰ In the wake of Khrushchev's destabilizing reforms, Brezhnev and his cohort indeed sought to slow down, to lower expectations about radical improvements in standards of living, and to focus on the present. In 1971, Brezhnev announced a new interpretation of the Soviet Union's present place in the Marxist-Leninist teleological timeline, declaring the present to belong to the phase of "developed socialism," a concept that justified the Soviet Union's leadership of its socialist satellites in Eastern Europe while avoiding reference to the nature or immediacy of the communist future.⁴¹

This new focus on the present also reflected the reform-oriented elite's widespread abandonment of belief in much of Marxism-Leninism and its teleology after the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia.⁴² Neither of these changes, however, meant the abandonment of belief in the eternal nature of the state, or in that state's need to mobilize Soviet citizens to increase productivity, without recourse to either significant economic reforms or to material incentives. This environment of continued ideological restrictions on the scope of economic reform, in combination with a lack of emphasis on the primary justification of the Party's authority, the communist future, encouraged experimentation. Central Television needed new ways of representing the Soviet public and unifying the population around shared values and tastes in the absence of a shared belief in the communist future. This also required clear ways of mediating the disputes that emerged in the open in the Brezhnev era's "culture wars," to borrow Richard Stites' term.⁴³ Television staff were urged, after 1968 and again after Lapin's arrival in 1970, to focus on arenas like taste, patriotism, and youth identities: important Cold War battlegrounds and potential alternative sources of unity, at least the kind of unity you have in a family fight. Engaging the audience very actively and openly in selecting the performers and songs for holiday concerts and the winners in game shows had a number of benefits in this context. Conflicts between different viewing audiences—young and old, rural and urban—could be addressed directly on air and compromises proposed. By making viewers into voters, Central Television elicited mass responses from the television audience. These shows received tens of thousands, even hundreds of thousands of letters and telegrams, far more than shows without such direct approaches to the audience. These numbers were publicized internally and on the air to demonstrate the popularity of the entertainments being provided, both to the audience and to Central Television's leadership.

This group of contest-based musical programs and game shows, whatever their flaws and limitations, were a spirited, emotionally resonant, and often fun response to the Soviet state's chief dilemmas in the post-Stalin period. Yet these shows, like so much else in late Soviet culture, also revealed the extent to which social and cultural change was eroding the bases of the Party's authority. In order to create a holiday concert that included something for everyone, including the politically important youth audience, Central Television had to include more and more of the world of Western pop and rock

⁴⁰ Bittner ends his discussion of the thaw metaphor by proposing instead that the thaw might be compared to the experience of driving at high speed—exhilarating, frightening, joyful, dangerous. Bittner, 12-13.

⁴¹ Mark Sandle, "Brezhnev and Developed Socialism: the Ideology of Zastoi?" in *Brezhnev Reconsidered*, 165-187. Brezhnev began to mention this concept in speeches in 1967. See Alfred B. Evans, Jr. "Developed Socialism in Soviet Ideology," *Soviet Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (July, 1977), pp. 409-428.

⁴² See Zubok, 298-299.

⁴³ Richard Stites, *Russian Popular Culture*, 148-149.

music: by the late 1970s, holiday musical concerts included not only popular Soviet pop groups and performers, but also ABBA and the West German-created Jamaican disco group Boney M. No less importantly, these shows proposed and practiced new rules for making collective decisions. In these shows' discussions about transparency, authority, and clear rules, conducted in print and on the air, there were clear echoes of the calls, among dissidents, for the Soviet state to obey its own laws.⁴⁴

Within the constraints of censorship, Central Television offered a wide range of genres, rituals, and languages, all of which gained political meanings from their presence on a medium so closely controlled by the Kremlin. The procedural forms of game shows and musical contests were far from the only significant development on Central Television in these years. They suggest, however, how the search for new ways to persuade, unify, and engage Soviet citizens after 1968 could lead to the elaboration of new models for public decision-making. Once rapid political change was introduced from above after 1985, these shows required very little adaptation. Holiday musical concerts added music videos and rock groups; game shows became important fora for political debate. Both continued seamlessly across the 1991 divide.

* * *

The dissertation is based on the archives of the State Committee for Television and Radio Broadcasting [*Gosudarstvennyi Komitet po Televideniiu i Radioveshchaniu Soveta Ministrov SSSR*], which are divided between the State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF) and the Central Archive for the Social and Political History of Moscow (TsAOPIM). These archives include transcripts of internal meetings, audience research conducted by Central Television, detailed reports on viewer letters, program transcripts marked up by the censors, and administrative documents on all aspects of Central Television's operations. I also draw on the relevant professional journals, interviews I conducted with Soviet television executives from the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, and archival film and video footage of the shows I discuss, which I viewed at the archive of the Russian Ministry of Communications' State Television and Radio Fund (*Gosteleradiofond*), as well as on youtube.com, current Russian television, and DVD recordings available from bookstores in Brighton Beach, NY.

These archives provide valuable information about the extent and forms of negotiation with the television audience in the creation of Central Television's content. The tensions between audience reception of Central Television and the ways that viewer response shaped Central Television's content constitute the first of three major themes in this dissertation. Admittedly, Central Television's extensive monthly and annual reports on viewer letters, which included direct quotations from individual letters, have many limitations. But, together with sociological surveys conducted by Central Television's audience research division, these sources are sufficient to reveal the various ways in which Central Television took audience response into account in creating programming, imagined viewer reactions as they created new shows, and sought to elicit particular kinds of audience responses with their programming. The dialog Central Television writers, editors, and directors maintained with real and imagined audiences also helps

⁴⁴ See Benjamin Nathans, The Dictatorship of Reason: Aleksandr Vol'pin and the Idea of Rights under "Developed Socialism" *Slavic Review* Vol. 66, No. 4 (Winter, 2007), pp. 630-663.

expose the limits of what was possible. For certain politically important programs, such as domestic news coverage on the evening news program *Time*, viewer frustrations with boring Soviet news coverage were shared by Central Television's News Desk staff and its leadership, but improvement turned out to be impossible because of ideological limitations on the kinds of narratives that could be part of Soviet domestic news. Finally, looking at viewer response and the content of Central Television's programming together reveals important instances where Central Television staff said one thing and did another. Despite public rhetoric about limiting television viewing, for example, Central Television's leadership decided, by the late 1960s, that it was more important to ensure that there was an audience for *Time* than it was to limit "excessive" TV viewing. The schedule they created for their new All-Union audience surrounded *Time* with the most desirable entertainments: sports matches, films, and plays, relegating directly propagandistic content to times when most Soviet citizens were not yet home from work.⁴⁵

Central Television's significant concern with audience response was partly a product of intense Cold War pressures, this dissertation's second theme, which shaped Central Television's content and schedule. Because the spread of television technology was delayed by the Second World War, television gained a mass audience in Europe and the United States during the Cold War, and became profoundly associated with its hopes and fears.⁴⁶ From its beginnings, television was at the heart of Cold War competition with the United States, as a key symbol of the consumer good life, as a medium for broadcasting Soviet space race triumphs live across Europe, and as a technology that was still, in the 1960s and 70s, relatively invulnerable to enemy broadcasting, unlike radio. By the end of the Khrushchev era, television's insulation from foreign broadcasting and its uniquely compelling visual form made it the key medium of Soviet Cold War counterpropaganda, which focused on news coverage and programming that aimed to convey the superiority of the Soviet "way of life."⁴⁷ Although the idea that Cold War pressures shaped Soviet television will seem rather obvious to anyone familiar with Cold War history in other countries, it is worth mentioning in the Soviet case, since Soviet cultural change is so often described as the product of exclusively endogenous factors, such as the restructuring of Soviet discourse that followed Stalin's death.⁴⁸ This dissertation joins a growing body of literature that demonstrates how crucial Cold War competition with a revitalized West was to Soviet political restructuring.⁴⁹ Throughout, I

⁴⁵ See Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

⁴⁶ Alan Nadel, "Cold War Television and the Technology of Brainwashing," in *American Cold War Culture*, Ed. Douglas Field (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 146-147.

⁴⁷ For the role of the "Soviet way of life" in the ideology of developed socialism, see Alfred B. Evans, Jr., "The Decline of Developed Socialism? Some Trends in Recent Soviet Ideology," *Soviet Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (Jan., 1986), pp. 1-23.

⁴⁸ The conceptualization of the thaw as a time of "de-Stalinization" has facilitated the focus on internal political dynamics, without much detailed consideration of the international environment that profoundly shaped them. See for example Polly Jones, ed. *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization. Negotiating Social and Cultural Change in the Khrushchev Era*. Likewise, Yurchak's brilliant discussion of the creation of a deterritorialized "Imaginary West" in Soviet everyday life devotes very little attention to the larger Cold War context of activities like foreign radio listening. Yurchak, *Everything was Forever*, 158-206.

⁴⁹ See for example Reid, "Cold War in the Kitchen"; Zubok, *Zhivago's Children*; and David Caute, *The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy during the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University

trace the importance of Cold War propaganda objectives in shaping the kinds of shows and schedules that Central Television created.

The third theme is comparative. Soviet television was defined by global pressures and intellectual currents that also shaped television in Europe and the United States. Television broadcasting practices, genres, and styles in Eastern and Western Europe and the United States served as models for Central Television personnel from the late 1950s. Yet there were important differences in the way Central Television staff understood the purpose of television in light of the Soviet Union's millenarian ideology. Comparison can sometimes devolve into a list of similarities and differences; I have tried to convey the relationship between Soviet television and its Western and Eastern European counterparts as a dynamic process of exchange, competition, and consistent efforts to define distinctive characteristics and purposes for Soviet television.

The dissertation is divided into five chapters. The first two explore the Soviet answers to two questions that any modern industrial state or corporation with a television system had to answer: how to understand television's nature and purpose as a medium, and how to learn about and respond to audience demand. The first chapter describes the emergence in the 1950s of a set of aesthetic claims about television that focused on liveness, unscriptedness, and the central place of the person on screen. It sets these ideas in their context as products of the thaw but also of broader trends in post-war Europe and the United States—many of these ideas were also widespread in the early years of American television. However, these ideas proved unusually enduring within Soviet television. Although the Soviet television golden age, like its American counterpart, soon came to an end, its ideas continued to be influential through the 1980s and, to a limited extent, beyond 1991. The second chapter describes how, in the mid-1960s, Central Television began to prepare for the opening of the Ostankino television center. Together with satellite broadcasting, which began at the same time, Ostankino made possible the broadcast of Central Television's Channel 1 to the entire Soviet Union. Creating a schedule that was to reach and suit everyone required articulating a relationship between audience demand and the priorities of Central Television's leadership and the Central Committee.

The next three chapters each trace the evolution of a particular genre of television programming: news programs, holiday musical shows, and game shows. Because of their popularity, each was the subject of very prolonged and heated discussions within Central Television and in professional journals about how they could be used to fulfill Central Television's propagandistic goals: to convince Soviet citizens of the superiority of Soviet life and mobilize them toward greater productivity, and to articulate norms of personal behavior and consumption that would facilitate these goals.⁵⁰ The third chapter explores the limits on Central Television staff's ability to innovate, by looking at Central Television's news programming. It describes the Cold War pressures that led to the creation of an evening news program modeled on Western evening news shows. These same pressures, however, also exposed the differences between the kinds of events and narratives that could be included in Soviet domestic news coverage and those that could

Press, 2003).

⁵⁰ Two other criteria determined my selection of these genres: each was produced by Central Television directly, not by Soviet movie studios, for example, and each was among the genres that were most popular with viewers, based on viewer letters and sociological surveys.

be included in foreign news coverage. The fourth chapter reflects on the disproportionate place of holiday programming in the Soviet television year in comparison with television elsewhere, asks what holiday television programs aimed to accomplish and how they did so, and traces two important changes that took place after 1968: the emergence of the New Year as the most important Soviet television holiday, and the proliferation of contests of taste and talent in New Year's festivities during the 1970s and early 80s. The fifth and final chapter discusses the unusually prominent place of game shows on Soviet television and traces the debates about fair play, the right to judge, and clear rules of the game that sprang up around them during the 1960s. It follows their evolution through the 1970s, when, like the holiday musical programs in the previous chapter, a number of Soviet game shows underwent a "procedural shift," experimenting on air with elections, public opinion polling, and other ways of negotiating conflicts of taste in the fractured social world of the 1970s. The dissertation concludes with an epilogue that traces the transformation of one famous quiz show, entitled *What? Where? When?*, from its founding in 1975 to 1991 and beyond.

“More than prose, more than the stage, more than motion pictures—oh, so much more than radio—television, with its immediacy, gets to the heart of the matter, to the essence of the character, to the depicting of the human being who is *there*, as if under the microscope, for our private contemplation, for our approval, our rejection, our love, our hate, our bond of brotherhood recognized.”¹

--Edward Barry, script editor for “Armstrong Circle Theatre,” 1952

“The television lens can see more clearly than we can.”
--Vladimir Sappak, television critic, 1960.

“Not a mirror but a magnifying glass”: Defining Soviet Television, 1957-1962

Chapter 1

1949 was a landmark year for Soviet television, one that offered a glimpse of a future that was less than a decade away, but still unimaginably distant.² The post-war reconstruction of the Moscow Television Center at Shabolovka was completed and the studio outfitted with most of RCA’s latest technology. An affordable, reliable, smaller television set, the “KVN-49” entered mass production, although it would take another eight years for the number of sets in the USSR to reach one million.³ But most importantly of all, on June 29, 1949, the Moscow Television Studio broadcast its first live

¹ William Boddy, *Fifties Television: the Industry and its Critics* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 81.

² For a detailed account of the expansion of the Soviet television network, see Kristin Roth-Ey, “Mass Media and the Re-making of Soviet Culture, 1950s-1960s” (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 2003), 247-313. Regular television broadcasting began in Moscow on November 15th, 1934, from the radio building on 25th of October Street. This was mechanical television, of much lower image quality than its electronic successor, and it reached just a few hundred television sets, meant for collective viewing in factory workers’ clubs and public places like the Polytechnical Museum. In 1938, a new television studio opened on Shabolovka Street, outfitted with the latest American electronic television equipment from RCA (equipment developed, albeit, by a Russian émigré, Vladimir Zvorykin) and nestled at the base of the Shukhovskaia radio tower, a landmark of Soviet avant-garde architecture completed in 1922. But whom would the new television center reach? A May 23rd, 1940 article in *Pravda* pointed out that in Moscow, for electronic television programming that cost 5000 rubles per hour to broadcast, there were only 300 electronic television sets, all of an enormous 1935 model with 33 lamps, 14 knobs for adjusting the image, and a pricetag of 10,000 rubles. Television, the article argued, needed a mass audience of viewers equipped with affordable television sets. There were scientists to design it, factories to build it, and popular demand for “movies in the home” [*kino na domu*]. Later that year, the Kozitskii factory in Leningrad began to produce the first television sets for home viewing—still wildly expensive and available to only a few hundred elite residents of Moscow and Leningrad. “Movies in the home” was an accurate description of what television brought to that handful of viewers. Besides movies, pre-war Soviet television broadcasts consisted mainly of concerts and fragments of plays or operas performed in the studio. Since actual viewers were so few, however, many of the Moscow television studio’s programs were also broadcast by radio, and were designed so that the absence of visuals would not be an obstacle to radio listeners’ enjoyment. In the summer of 1940, television began to offer news bulletins—repeats of the radio program “Latest news” read by radio newsreaders, or *diktory*, on camera. A. Iurovskii, “Ot pervykh opyтов k reguliarnomu veshchaniyu,” *Virtual’nyi muzei radio i televiziiniia*, http://www.tvmuseum.ru/catalog.asp?ob_no=4622&page=2

³ In 1954 there were 225,000 televisions in the three cities with television broadcasting: Moscow, Leningrad, and Kiev; by 1957 the number was 1 million. A. Iurovskii, *Televizionie—poiski i resheniya. Ocherki istorii i teorii sovetskoi telezhurnalistikii* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1975), 79.

soccer game from the Dinamo stadium.

The 1949 soccer broadcast was new because it was not only live (like all of Moscow Television's studio broadcasts in the late 1940s and 50s), but also unscripted (like radio sports broadcasting, but little else). And, unlike radio sports broadcasting, the televised soccer game was not only unscripted and improvised, but also truly immediate, simultaneous with the action taking place on the field. Viewers could now witness the game just the way spectators at the stadium could; they could be transported from their homes to the stadium instantaneously and observe the action as it unfolded, without knowing how it would turn out. The broadcast of a soccer match, like the game itself, was a special event, outside the rhythms of everyday life—a celebration of unpredictability, a chance to watch players compete to an uncertain conclusion (but a conclusion nonetheless), with the action, however, bounded by rules and time limits that set it off from the equally uncertain conflicts of daily life.⁴

Television also altered the role of the sports broadcaster, by transforming him from a reporter describing events the listener could not see into a commentator explaining their significance and conveying the emotions of the match. The June 1949 match did not yet reflect this change, because the television broadcast did not have its own audio signal. Vadim Siniavsky, the radio sports reporter whose voiceover accompanied the television broadcast, did not adjust his radio report for the television audience, simply because the latter was still made up of only a few thousand people, versus a radio audience of millions. By the second half of the 1950s, however, Siniavsky and his young colleague, Nikolai Ozerov, were changing their reporting style to take into account the television viewer's perspective.⁵ Yet television also raised another question for the future—was the sports reporter even necessary if the game's action was obvious to any fan viewing at home? Maybe the words of the commentator would only impede the viewer's direct experience of the game.⁶

That June 1949 soccer game revealed two qualities of television broadcasting—liveness (as unscriptedness and immediacy) and the special role of the individual on the television screen—that would become the foundation of a newly articulated Soviet television aesthetics and the ideal of many television producers, writers, editors, and critics. During the second half of the 1950s, these enthusiasts began to create content that reflected their belief that television's liveness and its ability to enhance vision, not only across space but also into the inner worlds of people on screen, were essential and unique qualities of TV as a medium. Of course, they based their ideas and programs on much more than the observation of early sports reporting. To define Soviet television, they drew from several Soviet arts and media traditions, especially from the cinematic and theatrical avant-gardes of the Civil War era and the 1920s and from live radio reporting from factories and construction sites in the early 1930s. But they also drew on illustrated

⁴ On Soviet spectator sports and the place of play and unpredictability in Soviet life, see Robert Edelman, *Serious Fun: a History of Spectator Sports in the USSR* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 7-25.

⁵ A. Iurovskii, "Ot pervykh opytov k reguliarnomu veshchaniiu," http://www.tvmuseum.ru/catalog.asp?ob_no=4622&page=4

⁶ Indeed, Soviet broadcasts of soccer and hockey were criticized in the press, both for confusing camerawork that obscured the game's action and for the useless chatter of some sports commentators. There was a burst of such criticism in 1968-71. See, for example, a satirical article about sports broadcasters' clichéd language by Kirill Zamoshkin, entitled "Kak stat' kommentatorom." *Zhurnalist*, No. 7 (July, 1971), 76.

print journals, Stanislavskyan theatre, and oral political agitation. As television's audience and influence grew, they began to use mobile television stations to cover people, places, and events outside the studio that had more explicit political meaning than sports matches could offer. But when they described the kind of television they envisioned—television that was a special event, that would awaken viewers from their routines and transport them to the scene of great events—they often compared it to the experience of watching a live soccer game unfolding on screen.⁷

This chapter will tell the story of the emergence of this particular view of television's "nature" as a medium among a group of television producers and critics in the Soviet Union during the late 1950s. This view of television as a medium, potentially an art form, of live immediacy and penetrating vision proved particularly enduring; it was still influencing the way Soviet television's on- and off-screen staff wrote about, talked about, and produced their programs until 1991 and even beyond. Indeed, because of the continued appeal of the ideas expressed during these years, the late 1950s and early 1960s have come to be known by Russian historians of mass media as the "golden age" of Soviet television.⁸ Therefore, even though this television aesthetics was reflected in only a small percentage of Central Television's daily content, this chapter will try to explain where these ideas came from, and how they fit into the time and place where they emerged.

That time and place was the years of Khrushchev's "thaw" in the Soviet Union. The television "golden age" and the thaw took place during the same years, and both began to be seen as distinct historical periods under Gorbachev.⁹ Like artists and

⁷ See for example Vladimir Sappak, *Televidenie i my: chetyre besedy* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1963), 50-51. This idea endured long beyond the late 1950s. In an article about the fourth annual Central Television seminar on reportage [*reportazh*] in Tallinn in 1969, the journalist Georgii Kuznetsov compared the ideal journalistic feature to sports broadcasting from a football game: the conclusion would be unknown, and out of the control of the broadcaster himself. See "Vstrechaitutsia 'telepersonazhi,'" *Sovetskoe radio i televidenie* No. 6 (June, 1969):32-33. See also Matvei Levinton, "KVN," *Sovetskoe radio i televidenie* No. 2 (February, 1968), 21;

⁸ For more on the memory, among former Central Television staff, of the period 1957-1970 as a "golden age", see Kristin Roth-Ey, "Mass Media," 277, 317, 376-379, 384, 390. To give just one example, the historical essay covering the years 1957-1970 on the Virtual Museum of Radio and Television website (a project to which a large number of prominent former Central Television staff have contributed), written by the former Chairman of Gosteleradio from 1964-1970 and the television journalist and scholar Georgii Kuznetsov, is entitled "The golden years of domestic television [*Zolotye gody otechestvennogo televideniya*]: the creation of the system of domestic TV." http://www.tvmuseum.ru/catalog.asp?ob_no=4623

⁹ For a discussion of the "thaw" metaphor and its historical and political evolution, see Stephen Bittner, *The Many Lives of Khrushchev's Thaw: Experience and Memory in Moscow's Arbat* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 1-13. Like the "thaw", the television golden age began to be seen as a period distinct from the "stagnation" of the Brezhnev era (the era of Sergei Georgievich Lapin's leadership from 1970-1985 at Central Television) during the mid-late 1980s. Many of the memoirs contributing to the golden age myth were published during *perestroika* or afterward; however, several were published in the early 1970s, notably L. Zolotarevsky *Tsityaty iz zhizni* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1971) and A. Iurovskii, *Televidenie—poiski i resheniya* (1975). During *perestroika*, the principles of the TV golden age, along with many other intellectual, artistic, and reformist currents of the 1960s, enjoyed a renaissance. For the 1960s origins of much of the *perestroika* agenda, see Mark Sandle, "A Triumph of Ideological Hairdressing? Intellectual Life in the Brezhnev Era Reconsidered," in *Brezhnev Reconsidered*, Eds. Edwin Bacon and Mark Sandle (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002) 139-142.

intellectuals working in other spheres of Soviet culture, television staffers in the late 1950s and early 1960s saw themselves as contributing to de-Stalinization by establishing new heroes and praising authenticity and sincerity, celebrating a flourishing of individual creativity in the arts, and spreading a renewed internationalism that brought the sights and sounds of other countries to Soviet people. Like other artists, directors, and writers during the thaw, television producers turned to the example of the avant-garde, and sought to define television's nature as a medium and purify it of borrowings from other media.¹⁰

And yet, the beliefs and hopes that these television enthusiasts expressed during the thaw also reveal some less commonly emphasized aspects of Soviet cultural life in these years, namely its connections to broader intellectual and political currents that also shaped life in the United States and Western Europe in this period. Soviet television critics' and producers' dreams about television's power to transcend time and space, make people transparent, and connect the intimate to the world historical shows us a side of the thaw that has not yet been fully explored—its close connections to the ambitions of the modern state in the post-war, Cold War world.¹¹

The investment in and expansion of television during the 1950s and early 1960s were in large part a direct product of Cold War pressure on the Soviet state.¹² But the “dreamworld” of Soviet television in this period, with its visions of transparency and immediacy, was also shaped by its international context in subtler ways.¹³ To understand this influence, we must consider the extremely close resemblance between the ideas of the Soviet television “golden age” and another one, set only a few years earlier, and taking place in the United States.

Television aesthetics in the United States in the 1950s

There is a danger, when describing Soviet artistic or ideological debates in any period, of cutting them off from their larger Western context and making them appear unduly strange and foreign. Because the ideology that underlay them is now extinct, they appear to be the product of a lost civilization. Not all of these debates, however, were entirely unique to the Soviet state; indeed, some of what now seem the strangest ideas about television's power were also voiced in the West. Before beginning an account of

¹⁰ Vladimir Papernyi, *Architecture in the Age of Stalin: Culture Two*, trans. John Hill and Roann Barris (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 172; Alexander Prokhorov, “Inherited Discourse: Stalinist Tropes in Thaw Culture,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 2002.

¹¹ Katerina Clark observed the continuing close connections between thaw literature and socialist realism in her classic study of the Soviet novel. See Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), 13-14. For a recent approach to this question, see Prokhorov, “Inherited Discourse.”

¹² As Kristin Roth-Ey has shown, the Soviet government decided to invest in television in response to the extremely threatening penetration of Soviet media space by foreign radio broadcasts; this commitment was only solidified when satellite technology raised the specter of American television broadcasting reaching Soviet homes. Khrushchev's 1959 trip to the United States further convinced him of television's power and the urgency of controlling it. Roth-Ey, “Finding a Home for Television in the USSR, 1950-1970,” *Slavic Review* 66 No. 2 (Summer 2007: 278-306), 279, 287-288.

¹³ Susan Buck-Morss, borrowing from Walter Benjamin, has defined modern political, cultural, and economic dreamworlds as “expressions of a utopian desire for social arrangements that transcend existing forms.” Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: the Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002), x-xi.

the emergence of a particular aesthetics of television in the Soviet Union, it is worth noting that many of the same ideas about television's nature and power were widespread among media elites in the United States and Western Europe before they gained currency in Moscow.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s a small but influential group of American television producers, journalists, and critics, including, most famously, Pat Weaver, the President of NBC from 1949 to 1956, began to describe television's two most important features as its liveness and its powers to enhance vision, granting viewers an x-ray view into everyday life, and especially into particular individuals on screen.¹⁴ These qualities, they argued, distinguished television from radio and cinema, which they saw as polluted by commercialism, and equipped it to serve as a powerful new medium for the perfection of American democracy and of every individual citizen, a newly urgent goal in light of the perceived Soviet cultural threat.

As would be the case in later Soviet debates, the metaphors they used to describe television were drawn from other branches of science that had expanded the range of human vision. No less a figure than Walter Cronkite referred to television having an "x-ray quality," an extraordinarily common metaphor for television among U.S. broadcasters. Lawrence Spivak, the founder of *Meet the Press*, observed that "TV has an almost infrared quality of getting beneath the skin of the interviewee."¹⁵ This visual power would allow viewers direct access to the private thoughts and feelings of the person on screen. As news producer Henry Cassirer asserted, "no radio interview can give you the intimacy of television, the familiarity...with the total personality of the guest, his looks, his gestures, his human qualities."¹⁶ Another script editor, Ann Bailey, characterized the television camera as a "scalpel with which to lay bare the human heart and spirit."¹⁷

American television enthusiasts hoped that television's x-ray vision would bring light and transparency to politics, exposing lies and corruption. In the wake of the 1952 electoral conventions in the United States, the first to be televised, the *New York Times* proclaimed that television "gives democracy an all-seeing eye"; the *Washington Post* assured readers that "the goldfish bowl and not the smoke-filled room hereafter will be the proper symbol of American political conventions."¹⁸ In 1956, John Daly of ABC declared that television had brought "the death of demagoguery, false prophets, and phonies. Even the politician who is a good actor soon tips off his viewer that he is pulling an act."¹⁹

In order to best take advantage of this quality of television, the American television schedule in the 1950s featured numerous programs that aimed to transport viewers to crucial political events and acquaint them with political, intellectual, and entertainment elites. The names of these series alone are striking: *Meet the Press*, *Meet the Boss*, *Meet the Champions*, *Meet the Masters*, *Meet the Professor*, *Meet the Veep*,

¹⁴ Boddy, 74.

¹⁵ Nancy E. Bernhard, *U.S. Television News and Cold War Propaganda*, Cambridge Studies in the History of Mass Communication (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 52.

¹⁶ Bernhard, 52.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Thomas Doherty, *Cold War, Cool Medium. Television, McCarthyism, and American Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 82.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Meet Your Congress—even *Meet Your Covergirl*—as well as the equally direct *See It Now* and *You Are There*. Liveness was an essential quality of such meetings and virtual travels and of television itself. As Jack Gould, the television critic at the *New York Times*, put it, “alone among the mass media, [television]...removes from an audience’s consciousness the factors of time and distance...Live television...bridges the gap instantly and unites the individual at home with the event afar...Physically, he may be at his own hearthside but intellectually, and above all, emotionally, he is at the cameraman’s side.”²⁰ In 1953, David Sarnoff, the head of RCA, William Paley, President of CBS, and most famously Pat Weaver, President of NBC, all agreed that live productions would and should continue to dominate the television screen in the future—*I Love Lucy*, which was pre-taped, was the exception that proved the rule.²¹

These ideas have been described as the product of a particular institutional context, which pitted the networks against low-budget Hollywood film producers who might strike separate content provision deals with the networks’ local affiliates, cutting the networks out of the production process entirely. The imperative to establish live, network-produced television as the standard combined naturally with widespread anti-Hollywood rhetoric and the recognition that live interview programs and dramas could help networks respond to the Federal Communications Commission’s demands that the networks earn their broadcast licenses with “public service” programs.²² But these administrative contexts are not sufficient to explain the heightened rhetoric about television’s power to transform society, and the specific forms it took, not least because many of the same ideas about the power of live reporting and interview programs were also widespread in Britain and continental Europe, where television was state-owned, and faced different administrative pressures.

Instead, this chapter will point out ways in which Soviet debates about television aesthetics—even when they were framed in terms Soviet arts traditions—reveal a surprisingly broad set of common assumptions and values shared by Soviet, American, and Western European television idealists. The historian David Caute has documented the ways in which the Cold War was fought in part as a contest over the inheritance of the Enlightenment; like all contests, the competition was made possible by substantial agreement about cultural values and terms of play.²³ The post-war shift toward social welfare and consumer bounty as a major site of competition between the Soviet Union and the United States encouraged the spread of television in those countries and their European spheres of influence.²⁴ It also put television at the heart of Cold War efforts to influence individual economic behavior and remake social and political life.²⁵ On both

²⁰ Boddy, 80.

²¹ Boddy, 74.

²² Boddy, 73.

²³ David Caute, *The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy during the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 3-4.

²⁴ For more on the expansion of global television broadcasting as an arena of Cold War competition, see James Schwoch, *Global TV: New Media and the Cold War, 1946-1969* (Urbana-Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2009).

²⁵ For a discussion of the origins of this quality of the post-war 20th century state, see Gianfranco Poggi, *The Development of the Modern State: a Sociological Introduction*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1978), 132-134. Although this argument might seem to apply more naturally to commercial television in the United States and Western Europe, Chapter 3 of this dissertation will describe how economic motives (particularly the goal of motivating workers and farmers to become more productive)

sides of the Atlantic, the combination of post-war optimism and Cold War cultural insecurity intensified hopes that a powerful new technology could transform society, and brought the enlightening ambitions of small groups of cultural elites in both places into closer alignment. The remainder of this chapter will trace the ways that these hopes and ambitions were translated into specific beliefs about television as a medium in the Soviet Union, noting points of intersection with American and Western European television along the way.

The discovery of liveness

Live broadcasting was an unavoidable part of early television everywhere, and was thus central to early understandings of the medium's nature.²⁶ In the Soviet Union in the 1950s, live programming was the only kind of content television workers could produce themselves, given Central Television's very limited access to costly film equipment. Live broadcasting thus offered the only real alternative, from the perspective of more ambitious Central Television staff, to accepting a view of television as merely a medium for the "home delivery" of movies.²⁷ It was also potentially the source of powerful, responsible onscreen roles for television workers. Live TV was also, however, highly risky—minor slips of the tongue on live air could have ruinous consequences, including firing.²⁸

In fact, the idea that liveness was not only a necessary, but also a desirable quality for television emerged quite late. It was, as we shall see, firmly established within Central Television by about 1957, but of course Soviet television had been live since its earliest experimental days in the mid-1930s. Many of the claims about television's nature that did appear in print in the first half of the 1950s, which would later be linked to liveness, did not assume that liveness was essential. The idea that television should serve as a "window on the world," for example, was advanced by articles in 1953 that focused on the exchange of film reels with foreign countries.²⁹

The notion of liveness as a defining characteristic of television was also not new: the same claim had been made for radio in the early 1930s. Then too, liveness was characterized as an essential part of all radio programs, but especially of live reports from factories and construction sites.³⁰ Similarly, in the early 1950s, when the mobile television station made it possible to cover life outside the studio, the power of liveness

shaped most of the direct propaganda on Soviet television (at least that which was not devoted to foreign affairs) during the 1960s and 1970s.

²⁶ See John Jacobs, *The Intimate Screen. Early British Television Drama*, Oxford Television Studies series, eds. Charlotte Brunsdon and John Caughey (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 15.

²⁷ The actor Igor Il'inskii, a television enthusiast and frequent guest, harshly criticized movie studios and theaters for denying their best content to television, and advocated original television content (ideally in cooperation with talent from those studios and theaters) in an important 1956 article that drew responses from viewers, television workers, even the Minister of Communications. "Razmyshleniia u televizora," *Literaturnaia gazeta* 12 May 1956 p. 1. Responses appeared on June 2, June 23, July 7, July 17, and August 30.

²⁸ Roth-Ey, "Mass Media," 333-336.

²⁹ See for example, E. Riabchikov "Pokazyvaet Moskva," *Ogonek* No. 18 (1953): 23-26; Galina Shergova, "Efir bez rubezhei," *Ogonek* No. 19 (May 1956): 14-15.

³⁰ T.M. Goriaeva, *Radio Rossii: Politicheskii kontrol' sovetskogo radioveshchaniia v 1920-1930-x godakh. Dokumental'naia istoriia, "Kul'tura i vlast' ot Stalina do Gorbacheva. Issledovaniia" series*, K. Aimermakher et al, eds. (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2000), 74.

was particularly linked to live *reporting*, the genre that linked sporting events and political ones.

The reassertion of the idea, drawn from radio, that liveness was an essential part of television broadcasting, and the first experiments with live broadcasts covering events other than soccer matches, could only emerge after television gained the equipment, resources, and administrative clout to break out of the studio. But more important was a new sense among television staffers that such live reports were desirable and necessary, and that they would be truly interesting to viewers. This sense began roughly in 1954-55, when young television staff began, along with a large part of a reconstituted thaw intelligentsia, to express utopian hopes about the changes in Soviet society. What had changed, therefore, was not television's liveness, but television enthusiasts' hopes about Soviet life outside the studio walls and the role television could have in revealing and furthering the transformation of Soviet life.³¹

Television workers' ambitions in the first half of the 1950s were severely constrained, however, by a lack of equipment—Central Television still had only one modern mobile television station before 1957. Although experimental broadcasts from outside the studio began to appear somewhat regularly in 1952-53, in 1955, television workers were still just beginning to think of new uses for the single modern mobile station they did have. In February 1955 Alexander Iurovskii, a young program editor [*redaktor*] who had arrived in 1954 from the illustrated journal *Ogonek*, organized the first live television report from a location other than a sporting event—the floor of the Red October chocolate factory.³² Yuri Fokin, a reporter borrowed from the prestigious foreign radio broadcasting division, led the report successfully, disproving those who insisted that the noise and flashing light of a factory floor would make television broadcasting impossible.³³ Other live reports from outside the studio followed, including the broadcast of Ho Chi Minh's arrival in Moscow in 1955, but they appeared very infrequently, due to the single mobile station and small proportion (less than 10%) of the schedule devoted to political broadcasting.³⁴

Breaking out of the sardine can of the studio: 1957 and the Moscow Youth Festival

Central Television received a major administrative promotion in the spring of 1957, which answered producers' and critics desire for greater autonomy and resources for television. Despite its name, granted in 1951, Central Television in early 1957 was far from an all-Union institution administratively. Since at least 1953, critics had noted the problems inherent in Central Television's administrative division between the Ministry of Culture, which controlled the Moscow Television Studio at Shabolovka and was responsible for all questions relating to the production of programs, and the Ministry of Communications, which controlled the production and supply of television equipment to the studio, as well as the network of relay stations outside Moscow.³⁵ This

³¹ For more on the atmosphere of youthful inspiration in Central Television during the 1950s, see Roth-Ey, "Mass Media," 321-325.

³² A. Rozov, ed. *Shabolovka*, 53 (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1988), 93-94. For the role of the *redaktor* in Soviet media organizations, see Roth-Ey, "Mass Media," 324 note 17.

³³ A. Iurovskii, "Ot pervykh opytov." Iurovskii tells this story in more detail in *Shabolovka*, 53, 93-94.

³⁴ A. Iurovskii, "Ot pervykh opytov k reguliarnomu televeshchaniiu," [tvmuseum.ru](http://www.tvmuseum.ru/catalog.asp?ob_no=4622&page=4) (Virtual'nyi Muzei Radio i Televideniia), http://www.tvmuseum.ru/catalog.asp?ob_no=4622&page=4

³⁵ V. Parkov, "Vozmozhnosti televideniiia ne ispol'zuiutsia", *Sovetskaia kul'tura*, July 16, 1953, p. 2.

administrative division became the subject of sustained press attention in the newspaper *Sovetskaia kul'tura* after a 1956 article by the actor Igor Il'inskii, which called for the liberation of television both artistically and administratively—it should cease copying other media and be run by a powerful new “Directory of Television.”³⁶ Finally, in May 1957, an order of the Soviet of Ministers of the USSR replaced the old structure governing radio and television by creating a State Committee for Radio Broadcasting and Television subordinate to the Council of Ministers [*Gosudarstvennyi komitet po radioveshchaniu i televideniiu pri Sovete Ministrov SSSR*, henceforth *Gosteleradio*].³⁷ The new committee took over all of the functions previously controlled by the Ministry of Culture. Problems with the Ministry of Communications continued, since *Gosteleradio* was still dependent on that Ministry for most of its equipment, from mobile television stations to cable for its cameras.³⁸ But, as part of a new State Committee, Central Television now had direct access to a high-level patron, the Chairman of the Council of Ministers, without competition from its rivals, theater and film, whose influence within the Ministry of Culture far outweighed that of radio and television. As icing on the cake, the new State committee’s administration moved into spacious offices in a newly constructed building at 25 Piatnitskaia Street. But this higher administrative and financial status was matched by greater, or at least more formalized, scrutiny from above. During the summer of 1957 the Central Committee also created a “radio and television sector” within its own administration to watch over television’s innovations.³⁹

This long-awaited administrative consolidation legitimated television workers’ desire to pursue more ambitious kinds of programming. A major infusion of new equipment and resources that spring, in advance of the Moscow Youth Festival that summer, made it possible. After a group of young television workers gathered signatures from actors, writers, and academicians for a letter to Khrushchev, Central Television received a new studio building, six new mobile broadcast stations, ten 16-millimeter film cameras, and other equipment.⁴⁰ Television’s growing audience—in 1957 the number of television sets in the Soviet Union (really the major cities in European Russia and Ukraine) reached 1 million—also encouraged television workers to begin to think big, and to claim a role for themselves in the field of Soviet media that was equivalent to or greater than that of cinema or theater.

This infusion of resources for television was timed to coincide with the Moscow Youth Festival of July, 1957, for which television staff began preparing months in advance and which provided an opportunity for television’s creators to realize and prove the merits of their ideas. The Youth Festival was a transformational moment for television, as it was for the city landscape as a whole. It was a chance to break out of the confining walls of the studio and into the streets, where the Festival’s mass spectacles

³⁶ “Razmyshleniia u televizora,” *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 12 May 1956.

³⁷ In Russian *Gosudarstvennyi komitet po radioveshchaniu i televideniiu pri Soveta Ministrov SSSR*. The Committee’s name changed over time. In 1970, the order of “television” and “radio broadcasting” in the name was reversed, to reflect television’s ascendancy as the primary Soviet mass medium. In television and radio’s last and greatest administrative promotion, in 1978, the “*pri Soveta Ministrov SSSR*” was dropped and the Committee was granted the effective status of an all-Union ministry.

³⁸ “Rech’ Tov. Trainina na partiinom sobranii Gosudarstvennogo komiteta po radioveshchaniu i televideniiu pri SM SSSR,” February 28, 1958. TsAOPIM f. 2930, op. 1, d. 2, l. 1.

³⁹ Kuznetsov and Mesiatsev, “Zolotye gody,” http://www.tvmuseum.ru/catalog.asp?ob_no=4623

⁴⁰ Roth-Ey, “Mass Media,” 341-2.

were destroying the barrier between actors and audience, turning all of Moscow—remade for the occasion into an international metropolis—into a stage.⁴¹ The result is celebrated in television workers’ memoirs as a trial by fire, when chaos in the streets forced young journalists to throw away their planned broadcast scenarios and become journalists, authors of their own improvised speech.⁴²

Extreme conditions during the Festival quickly led to a breakdown in the broadcast plan, which had imagined carefully timed broadcasts from various points around the city. As he watched the Festival parade from one broadcast point, the young TV reporter Yuri Fokin was hit by falling rubble when a roof collapsed under the weight of people who had climbed up for a view of the streets. However, bleeding from the forehead and his clothes ruined, he caught a ride on a police motorcycle, made it to the Luzhniki stadium and, cleaned up and liberally injected with stimulants by medics, managed to broadcast live for three hours, since his colleagues could not get through the crowds outside the stadium. Fokin could not remember what he said, but Leonid Zolotarevskii, a young translator and reporter who would go on to work with Fokin on *Estafeta novostei*, remembers his own unplanned 1.5 hour broadcast on the first day as follows: “We didn’t have much material, and even less information, but we had more enthusiasm than we could use. We held out on enthusiasm alone. And after that were 14 days and 14 nights—demonstrations, concerts, meetings, and simply festivities in the squares.”⁴³

In Zolatarevsky’s memory the 14 days and 14 nights of the Festival function like the 40 days and nights of the biblical flood, washing away the old, compromised world of stilted, artificial television journalism and ushering in the new. The spring of 1957 had seen a number of propaganda campaigns in which television, with the help of its new cameras and mobile stations, had participated more actively than before, although not in the ways envisioned by enthusiasts like Zolatarevsky. Foremost among these was Khrushchev’s reorganization of the Soviet government into Economic Councils [*sovnarkhozy*] instead of Ministries, a campaign that television’s new cameras could support with images of demonstrations in favor of the change, along with the prescribed text to be read by the dictors. Only a month after the passage of the Economic Councils law, the television, along with the rest of the Soviet mass media, informed the Soviet people that a Plenum of the Central Committee had from June 22nd to 29th considered the actions of the “anti-Party group of G. M. Malenkov, L.M. Kaganovich, and V.M. Molotov” and found them guilty of opposing the “popular” Economic Council measure and the Party’s call to catch up to and surpass the United States in the production of meat and milk. In practice, this meant that television’s dictors read the text of the Plenum’s decree on air several times, a role that offered less professional satisfaction than nearly dying under collapsing buildings and heroically going on to broadcast live.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Eleonor Gilburd, “1957 in Soviet Russia,” conference presentation at *Remembering 1957: 50 Years of Slavic Studies at Berkeley*, October 3rd, 2007, Alumni House, UC Berkeley.

⁴² Roth-Ey, “Mass Media,” 341-343; See also Vladislav Zubok, *Zhivago’s Children: the Last Russian Intelligentsia* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), 150-151.

⁴³ G. Kuznetsov and N. Mesiatsev “Zolotye gody otechestvennogo televideiniia (1957-1970): stanovleniie sistemy otechestvennogo TV,” [tvmuseum.ru](http://www.tvmuseum.ru/catalog.asp?ob_no=4623), http://www.tvmuseum.ru/catalog.asp?ob_no=4623

⁴⁴ Kuznetsov and Mesiatsev, “Zolotye gody.” The Youth Festival also fell between two interventions by Khrushchev in the capital’s artistic life: his address to the Moscow Writers’ Union on May 13th, and his article “For close ties between literature and art and the life of the people,” published on August 28th. Both

The team of television workers who remember their experience in the Youth Festival as a purifying flood had actually been rehearsing for their on-air improvisations for months beforehand. The team of young reporters had undergone careful training in improvisational speaking on camera in order to create the illusion of the spontaneity that conditions sprang upon them.⁴⁵ Given that the Youth Festival has become a central event in the narrative of personal self-discovery that shapes the golden age myth, it is also difficult to say whether their efforts were successful. An internal *Gosteleradio* report on the Festival coverage completed shortly afterwards, on August 17th, gives a mixed impression: it criticized the speech of the young journalists as insufficiently original or profound, and mentioned that some correspondents had spoken in formulaic, stereotyped language.⁴⁶ What this makes clear, however, is the extent to which expectations about the on-air roles of television workers and the language they would use had changed by the summer of 1957, at least within Central Television's own leadership. These beliefs inside Central Television began to appear in print over the next few years, and the Youth Festival broadcasts were quickly canonized as an example of broadcasting that took advantage of television's power as a medium.

The Youth Festival and liveness as an essential quality of television

A theater critic named Vladimir Sappak was among the first and most important public voices defining the nature and role of Soviet television after the Youth Festival. A graduate of the Gorky Literary Institute, Sappak had begun his career as a journalist in the Sovinformburo, moved on to the newspaper *Sovetskoe iskusstvo*, and finally arrived at the journal *Teatr* as the head of the criticism department, where he worked for the rest of his life. Despite this relatively modest post, however, Sappak was at the center of a circle of Moscow artists and intellectuals who gathered at his family's communal apartment on Klementovsky pereulok, and his critical articles were widely read and admired.⁴⁷

Sappak's 1960 article on television in *Novyi mir* was a sensation in Moscow's artistic circles, and his collected essays on television, published in 1963 after his premature death at the end of 1961, became "the bible of television in the 1960s," according to Georgii Kuznetsov, a former television worker turned television historian.⁴⁸ This reverence extended beyond the small circle of television enthusiasts: Sappak is

sought to rein in unorthodox experiments in the arts and literature, and television workers, many of whom sympathized and socialized with artists and writers, were occasionally punished for covering controversial exhibitions, including after a program covering the 1962 Vystavka molodykh khudozhnikov. See TsAOPIM f. 2930, op. 1, d. 147, l. 181.

⁴⁵ See Leonid Zolotarevskii's reminiscences in G. Kuznetsov and N. Mesiatsev, "Zolotye gody," www.tvmuseum.ru/catalog.asp?ob_no=4623

⁴⁶ "Otchet i informatsiia Moskovskikh organizatsii po VI Vsemirnomu festivaliu molodezhi i studentov v g. Moskve" TsAOPIM f. 4, op. 104, d. 30, p. 181. The sense that television ought to avoid worn-out formulas was shared by both its intelligentsia-aspiring journalists and its Party supervisors; however, political controls often meant that such formulas were safer and easier for television workers to employ.

⁴⁷ Neia Zorkaia, "Zapiski mechtatelia (perechityvaia knigu)," foreword to Vladimir Sappak, *Televideenie i my: chetyre besedy*, 3rd. edition (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1988). Full text online at <http://www.evartist.narod.ru/text12/89.htm>

⁴⁸ For a detailed and insightful discussion of Sappak see Roth-Ey, "Mass Media," 293-295, 329, 337-352. Vladimir Sappak, "Televideenie, 1960. Iz pervykh nabliudenii," *Novyi Mir* No. 10 (October 1960): 177-203. Vladimir Sappak, *Televideenie i my: chetyre besedy* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1963). Kuznetsov quoted in Roth-Ey, "Mass Media," 337.

quoted by name in the entry on television in the 1969-1978 edition of the *Bol'shaja Sovetskaia Entsiklopedia*. Sappak's book, which continues to be assigned in Russian journalism departments today, made him not only Soviet television's most influential critic, but also its most important viewer. The book is diary of a television viewer, and presents critical reflections on television's nature as responses to particular programs he has seen. His readings of television from the perspective of an ideal viewer—critically and aesthetically astute—were written in a style that was at once intimate and informal (the book was organized into “conversations”) and inspired, even “prophetic.”⁴⁹ For his readers, Sappak’s visionary claims about television’s excitement and power were made more poignant by the fact that he suffered from a lifelong terminal blood condition that kept him housebound during the last years of his life.

For Sappak, watching at home, the most important experience of the Youth Festival was not that of the television announcers who became journalists that day, but his own, watching the festival unfold on screen. What viewers saw, Sappak argued, was something greater than the greatest documentary film, a new and genuine fulfillment of the documentary filmmaker Dziga Vertov’s term “life caught unawares.”⁵⁰ He set the scene:

The television cameras are set up right in the street, in Peace Prospect, Mayakovskiy Square, Rebellion Square. And the unending stream of open cars—that’s the festival delegates. Out of the general procession, from the immense crowds of people, the television captures separate groups of figures. The close-ups are like portraits from a good photography exhibition....⁵¹

Like a documentary film, television could select images and reveal them to viewers in a new way. Like a film camera, Sappak wrote, “the lens of a television camera sees more clearly than we can, it can look into the faces of passersby, it can see that every building has its own identity, it can notice that which we don’t notice in the familiar [primel’kavshemsia] landscape.”⁵²

The mediation of the television screen, Sappak argued, made possible the acquisition of something like what Russian avant-gardists, before and after the 1917 revolution, had called “new vision” [*novoje zrenie*], that is, a revolution in perception or secular revelation brought about by art, through which man might be jolted out of his quotidian routine and caused to see the world in a new, more authentic way.⁵³ According to Sappak,

The frame renews and activates, transforms life into the object of observation, into a spectacle, allows it to be glanced at as if from outside...Spontaneously or by the will of the cameraman-director...the ‘composition of the frame,’ the artistic relationship between parts, emerges: all of this aesthetically organizes life,

⁴⁹ Neia Zorkaia, “Zapiski mechthatelia (perechityvaia knigu.”

⁵⁰ Vl. Sappak and V. Shitova, *Sem’ let v teatre* and Vl. Sappak, *Televidenie i my: chetyre besedy* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1968)184-5.

⁵¹ Ibid., 185.

⁵² Ibid., 177.

⁵³ Katerina Clark, *Petersburg: Crucible of Cultural Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 30-38.

places accents, in the final analysis—expresses a relationship to life. And thus, the broadcast of the Moscow Festival was the highest achievement of documentary television.⁵⁴

But television's achievement at the Youth Festival had been greater than what would have been possible for documentary film. If films about the festival had been made and viewed later, Sappak argued, the experience would not be the same. "What if films had been made, where there was lighting, and intense montage, and a poetic voiceover," he wrote. "They would also excite us. But it would not be the same unmediated, live, and unique excitement."⁵⁵ Because television was broadcast in real time, the audience's participation was much deeper, almost physical. Viewers

are living the same minute and the same way as those who are walking or riding through the streets, they feel the significance of this minute, its live breath. This is how it is—some in the streets, some at their windows, and others by their televisions, and they all share the same excitement, the same responsibility. We are all participants in the Moscow festival!⁵⁶

Only live broadcasting made this sense of participation possible, including viewers in what Sappak identified as "an inspired improvisation—on the scale of the whole city."

The notion of the festival as an "improvisation" draws our attention to a second important difference between the television broadcast of the Festival and a documentary film—the extent of the television cameras' mediation of the live scene in the streets. Sappak's description of how television created an aesthetic experience beyond that of simply witnessing the events notably leaves out many of the techniques used by the Soviet documentary filmmakers. In the passage above, Sappak leaves it uncertain whether the "composition of the frame" arises "spontaneously" or "by the will of the cameraman-director." This nearly passive mediation bears little resemblance to Eisenstein's montage, for example, which shook viewers out of their visual routines by juxtaposing unlike images and breaking the frame.⁵⁷ Sappak's description of the festival's action as an "improvisation" tips us off to an important shift in the relationship between a documentary medium and reality itself: for Sappak, part of what makes television an especially promising candidate as an art form, despite the seemingly limited artistic resources of a live broadcast medium, is that life itself was becoming more like art.

Sappak made this point cautiously, carefully alternating between the idea that television might help viewers see anew, and the idea that this aesthetic revolution had already moved beyond the consciousness of enlightened individuals and into the documentary world of fact. Vertov's desire to expose life's underlying meaning by "catching it unawares" might no longer require such subterfuge as hidden cameras. "In our days," Sappak wrote, "life is laying bare its substrata, forming and carrying to the surface 'generalized' characters, so that it seems to be doing art's work for it."⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Sappak, *Televidenie i my* (1968 ed.), 186.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 186.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 186.

⁵⁷ Clark, *Petersburg*, 33-34.

⁵⁸ Sappak, *Televidenie i my* (1968 ed.), 185.

Transforming life into art might require only the most minimal intervention by the artist/cameraman, or perhaps none at all.

Sappak's claim, and the problem of the relationship between artistic representation and documentary fact more generally, had a long history in Russian and Soviet art criticism. The idea of a "self-typifying" reality had appeared in Russian art criticism since Nikolai Chernyshevsky.⁵⁹ Eisenstein himself had famously imagined a "televisual wizard of the future," a kind of improvising genius who could edit on the fly, without much recourse to artistic mediation.⁶⁰ The Soviet novel of the 1930s also sought to bridge the gap between the world as it "is" and as it "ought to be" by moving seamlessly between the realistic and the epic, a feature of Soviet literature Katerina Clark has called "modal schizophrenia."⁶¹

These ideas were also far from unique to the Soviet state: advertising in capitalist societies also represents the world "in its future development" by portraying a recognizable world that is nonetheless more beautiful and prosperous than our own, and proposing that in fact no gap between these worlds exists, at least for those who consume the product advertised. As the sociologist Michael Schudson has argued, American advertising might be characterized as "capitalist realism," presenting "typical" characters enjoying a future-in-the-present world of consumer abundance and beauty.⁶² Advertising also seeks to dissolve the boundary between this ideal world and our own; among many other tactics, advertisers frequently rely upon celebrity endorsements in which actors play themselves, speaking directly to viewers, much like the artists and performers appearing on Soviet television.⁶³

Yet the kind of documentary television Sappak was describing offered far less room for artifice than novels or pre-filmed advertisements, and was thus highly vulnerable to the intrusion of the non-ideal. This was not a serious problem for an optimist like Sappak, who believed that the occasional inarticulate worker or awkward detail did not threaten what he saw as the majestic, inspiring qualities of everyday life as a whole. But, for other audiences, this linked television dangerously closely to the reality being broadcast. What if some part of real life that didn't look much like art, at least to television's censors, got on the air?

This was exactly the situation that arose only two months after the Youth Festival, with a program that had been airing since May 1957 as part of the Festival preparations, and aimed at bringing values like those described by Sappak, including "improvisation" and audience "participation," to television.⁶⁴ The program was an entertaining game show of sorts, entitled *Evening of Merry Questions* [*Vecher veselykh voprosov*] and usually called by the acronym of its name in Russian, *VVV*. The program, and especially

⁵⁹ Anri Vartanov, "Problema vzaimootnosheniia dokumenta i obraza" in *V zerkale kritiki: iz istorii izucheniiia khudozhestvennykh vozmozhnostei massovoi kommunicaktsii*, Eds. VI. Borev and S. Furtseva (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1985), 68-69.

⁶⁰ Neia Zorkaia has written that this quotation from Eisenstein could serve as an epigraph for the early years of television. Zorkaia, "Formirovaniye kontseptsii televizionnoi mnogoseriinosti," in *V zerkale kritiki*, 91.

⁶¹ Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, 36-41.

⁶² Schudson, *Advertising, the Uneasy Persuasion. Its Dubious Impact on American Society* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1984), 215.

⁶³ Ibid., 216.

⁶⁴ For a discussion of the connections between *VVV* and the ideas of the theatrical avant-garde, particularly Aleksei Gan's *massovoe deistvo*, see Chapter 5 of this dissertation.

its demise, in September 1957, is another landmark in numerous memoirs about early television and subsequent historical accounts of those years.⁶⁵ According to both documents from the summer of 1957 and numerous subsequent interviews and memoirs, the show was one of the centerpieces in a campaign among television workers to create programs that truly took advantage of television's form and directly engaged viewers. As A.A. Alexeev, one of *VVV*'s creators, recalled,

we didn't agree with the existing system at that time of using the television screen mainly for showing movies and theatrical plays. What was the point of inventing the television set, if you were going to turn it into a tool of the cinema distribution administration! The World Youth Festival was approaching. The broadcasts of Festival events were supposed to show everyone who would listen the power and potential of television. We prepared for the broadcasts and tried to push for programs aimed at a mass audience, programs whose heroes could become, at any moment, everyone sitting by their television screens.⁶⁶

Alexeev also admitted that the show's form was not the invention of the Central Television staff—they had heard of a similar “merry review” in Czechoslovakia, and of all manner of entertaining “shows” in the United States.⁶⁷ But they dreamed of creating their own unique version of a program that engaged audiences actively and aimed mostly at entertainment; they wanted to reinvent the genre themselves.

Like both the Youth Festival broadcasts and quiz shows in the United States, however, *VVV* was anything but a totally spontaneous slice of real life. Television workers debated the need to plant audience members who could answer the program's quiz questions in a manner befitting Soviet youth, and thus avoid the embarrassment of less than literate members of the “mass” audience bungling simple questions.⁶⁸ Contests involving appeals to the larger audience at home were carefully organized in advance but staged to appear spontaneous. One such contest, held on the one-month anniversary of the show's creation, asked parents of one-month-old children with the initials V.V.V. to bring them to the studio, where they would be shown and congratulated on air. Of course, the show's organizers had ensured a week in advance that such children did exist and arrangements were made with their parents.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ For the most complete account of the scandal in English, see Roth-Ey, “Mass Media,” 354-56, 359-366. See also A. Iurovskii's account in Kuznetsov and Mesiatshev, “Zolotye gody,” http://www.tvmuseum.ru/catalog.asp?ob_no=4623; Elena Gal'perina's, “Ispoved' redaktora,” in *Shabolovka*, 53, 206; R. Boretskii, Gosteleradiofond oral history project interview (n.d.).

⁶⁶ Interview in Elena Gal'perina, Marat Giul'bekian, and B. Sergeeva, *KVN? KVN...KVN!* (Moscow: Komitet po radioveshchaniu i televideniiu pri Sovete Ministrov SSSR Nauchno-metodicheskii otdel, 1966), 9. At a June 14, 1957, meeting of Central Television workers a similar point was made about the program's intent: “*po zamyslu avtorov i postanovshchikov peredachi byla vtianuta vo vse to, chto proiskhodit na stsene, samaia shirokaia zritel'skaia auditoriiia*,” from “Stenogramma letuchki rabotnikov Tsentral'noi Studii televideniiia” GARF f. 6903 op. 31 d. 3, l. 11.

⁶⁷ Galperina et. al, *KVN? KVN...KVN!*, 9-10; Roth-Ey, “Mass Media,” 355; see also Leonid Zolotarevsky, interview with Natalia Otamas' on Virtual'nyi muzei radio i televideniiia, http://www.tvmuseum.ru/catalog.asp?ob_no=10636.

⁶⁸ “Stenogramma letuchki rabotnikov Tsentral'noi Studii televideniiia (14 June 1957),” GARF f. 6903, op. 31, d. 3, l. 17.

⁶⁹ Galperina et al., *KVN? KVN...KVN!*, 10.

VVV was, like the Youth Festival broadcasts, an “improvisation” akin to those in theater or music. This kind of improvisation incorporated moments of unpredictable and spontaneous creativity—the appearance of real people on screen in unscripted roles—into a carefully scripted framework (a parade, a game show), the terms of which were not meant to be violated. Unlike the visual experiments of avant-garde film, transgression had little role to play here.⁷⁰ However, the immediacy of live broadcasting was of course highly vulnerable to exactly such transgressions, and their possibility was part of what made live television so exciting, for viewers and for some television workers themselves.⁷¹ In the case of *VVV*, concerns were aired at staff meetings early on about the show’s risky format, which called for spontaneous answers from a studio audience of 800 people in the Palace of Culture near MGU. A television worker who raised this problem at a June staff meeting gave a warning that turned out to be nearly prophetic: “the biggest catastrophe would be if some scoundrel [*merzavets*] manages to get through to the microphone. If that happens, then no excuses can save us [*i togda my s vami ne otkupimsia nichem*].”⁷²

The show’s final episode has become the stuff of legend.⁷³ As Alexeev remembered, “*VVV* stayed in our memory as a colossal exclamation point, as an inscription carved on a cliff in the Pamir mountains: ‘Traveler, be wary! You are like a tear on an eyelash.’”⁷⁴ Even those who were hired only after the program was taken off the air remember being warned by superiors with the phrase: “what, wasn’t one *VVV* enough for you?”⁷⁵ On September 28, the program’s host, the composer and emcee Nikita Bogoslovskii, announced a contest to the audience watching at home. The first person to arrive at the studio wearing their winter outerwear, including hat, coat, and boots, and carrying a copy of the previous new year’s edition of the newspaper *Komsomol’skaia pravda*, would win a prize. Unfortunately, Bogoslovskii failed to mention the second condition, and within minutes hundreds of people dressed in winter clothes were flooding the Palace of Culture auditorium and pressing toward the stage. Some of them, according to some accounts, were workers, maybe even conscripted prisoners, from the dormitories of a nearby construction site, whose ragged winter clothes were stored right in their rooms.⁷⁶ As television staff panicked, a call was made to the police for help dispersing the crowd. After a long pause during which the chaos in the hall was reaching thousands of television screens in and around Moscow, the program went off the air.⁷⁷

The response from the Party’s Central Committee was swift and severe. By a decision of the Central Committee Secretariat, V.S. Os’minin, the director of Central Television was fired along with many other high-ranking television workers who had

⁷⁰ Clark, *Petersburg*, 33-35.

⁷¹ Roth-Ey, “Mass Media,” 361.

⁷² “Stenogramma letuchki rabotnikov Tsentral’noi Studii televideniia (14 June 1957),” GARF f. 6903, op. 31, d. 3, l. 17.

⁷³ See Roth-Ey, “Mass Media,” 359-366 for a detailed narration of the events that day and the major memoir accounts.

⁷⁴ Galperina et al, *KVN? KVN...KVN!*, 11.

⁷⁵ E. Galperina, “*Ispoved’ redaktora*,” in *Shabolovka* 53, 206.

⁷⁶ Interview with R. Boretskii, Gosteleradiofond oral history project, n.d.

⁷⁷ For several accounts of the story see G. Kuznetsov and N. Mesiatsev, “Zolotye gody otechestvennogo televideniia” http://www.tvmuseum.ru/catalog.asp?ob_no=4623

been close to him. The text of the decision harshly criticized the show not only for the loss of control on air, but for its “spiritual emptiness.” After the Youth Festival the show had been continued because of its popularity with viewers, but it now lacked a clear political purpose beyond entertainment. The message that this kind of improvisation—the kind featuring large uncontrolled crowds overwhelming the authorities on air—was unacceptable was heard loud and clear.⁷⁸ Just in case it had not been, the ranks of Central Television’s employees were reinforced with Central Committee-approved “commissars,” as one former television worker called them.⁷⁹

Among the viewers tuned in to *VVV* that September evening was Vladimir Sappak, for whom even the show’s final collapse was a peak experience. “We, the viewers,” he wrote,

became witnesses of how the people filling the building kept arriving and arriving from the city, they’ve already filled the whole stage, we saw how the program’s organizers were at a loss, an ‘agonizing’ pause began (for us, it was filled with excitement and impressions!); finally, the program was interrupted, cut short. A little later in some places there was even an announcement that, supposedly, the ‘guilty’ were being prosecuted. Really, they should have been awarded a prize!⁸⁰

With the professional costs of such errors on live air so high, however, most television editors and directors were not at liberty to propose that all unmediated reality—even a raucous crowd flooding an auditorium—could be aesthetically justified. But there was another kind of programming, far easier to control, that could equally realize television’s potential as an art form that could grant viewers “*novoe zrenie*.” These programs focused on individuals, not street scenes or festive crowds, and revealed the transformation of particular people, not the whole of Soviet everyday life. These programs could be produced in the studio, and demanded no special mobile equipment, yet they too could be connected with television’s nature, including its liveness and intimate setting in the home.

The individual on screen

The idea that television might be a window into the soul as well as a window onto the world began to appear in print only in the late 1950s, but there were signs that television could make unexpected people into celebrities from television’s earliest post-war years. The television announcers—all female until Igor Kirillov joined them in the fall of 1957—were responsible for everything from reading the news report to announcing each program as it began and ended. They were Soviet television’s first true celebrities.⁸¹ As with their counterparts on French television in this period, the all-female *speakerines* who played a similar role as announcers and hostesses of the airwaves, close attention was paid to their clothing and hairstyles.⁸² They were famously known to

⁷⁸ A. Iurovskii in Kuznetsov and Mesiatsev, “Zolotye gody,” http://www.tvmuseum.ru/catalog.asp?ob_no=4623.

⁷⁹ Rudol’f Boretskii, interview, Gosteleradiofond oral history project.

⁸⁰ Sappak, “Televidenie, 1960. Iz pervykh nabliudenii,” 185.

⁸¹ Kirillov’s arrival in September, 1957, just in time to read the announcement that a Soviet satellite had orbited the moon, was presumably no coincidence. For his reminiscences about joining the staff of *diktory*, see I. Kirillov, “Glazami diktora,” *Shabolovka*, 53, 134-141.

⁸² For recollections and images of the *speakerines*, see Patrick Mahé, *La Television Autrefois* (Édition

viewers by the intimate diminutives of their first names, forms reserved for the closest friends and family members: Valentina Leon'teva was "Valechka," Nina Kondratova, "Ninochka."⁸³ Their popularity with viewers, however, and the intimate tone that popularity took, was unlike that of movie stars and radio announcers. As Leont'eva remembers, famous actors would often receive viewer mail addressed to their secretaries, but letters to the announcers were always addressed directly to them, in the belief and hope that they were the same in real life as they were on screen.⁸⁴

For the film director Mikhail Romm, the popularity of the television announcers was an indication of a powerful new quality native to television:

When an announcer or an invited public figure talks with the viewer from the television screen, the viewer feels an intimate connection with him or her. This is exactly what explains the unusually widespread popularity of the television announcers. When the announcer speaks from the screen, looking straight into the lens of the television camera, it seems to the viewer that the announcer's gaze is directed straight at him, as if the announcer is looking him in the eye.

The viewer, in turn, felt obliged to look back. "I myself," Romm wrote, "feel the need to say goodbye to the announcer, when he or she says goodbye to me. And if I'm watching television alone, then I go ahead and do so."⁸⁵

Television's location in the home, its reception by viewers alone or in small circles of family and friends, meant that television workers needed to adjust their manners and forms of address to fit this evening environment, where they were engaging with viewers as individuals, rather than as members of a crowd. Artificial, stilted speech, official phrases—none were appropriate for television, which was a "guest" in the home, a formula that was widely used to describe broadcast media in the United States and elsewhere.⁸⁶ As V. Ardamatskii put it in *Literaturnaia gazeta* in 1960, this domestic, intimate setting meant that television producers and performers

should sense the inappropriateness of stilted [*vysprennego*] conversation with viewers. They should be sure to toss out worn-out [*tertykh*] words like so much garbage, and seek the singular exactness in thought and intonation, without which they could never get by in a direct, intimate [*zadushevnom*] conversation with a friend.⁸⁷

Hoëbeke, 2006), 18-21.

⁸³ Roth-Ey, "Mass Media," 345 n. 64. As Roth-Ey notes, "Piat' vecherov" [Five evenings], a play by A. Volodin and a famous eponymous film adaptation by the director Nikita Mikhalkov, immortalized the question that was supposed to have been typical in Soviet apartments with a television in the 1950s: "Kto segodnia—Ninochka, ili Valechka?", that is, who will be reading the news tonight, Nina Kondratova or Valentina Leont'eva?

⁸⁴ Valentina Leont'eva, *Ob "iasneniie v liubvi: zapiski diktora Tsentral'nogo televiedeniia*, 2nd ed. Mastera iskusstv—molodezhi series (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1989), 162-3.

⁸⁵ Mikhail Romm, "Pogliadim na dorogu" *Iskusstvo kino* No. 11 (November, 1959):127-128.

⁸⁶ James Baughman, *Same Time, Same Station: Creating American Television* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 4. For one example of the frequent reference to television as a "guest" in the apartment, see Iraklii Andronikov, "Rasskaz na ekrane," *Literaturnaia gazeta* May 7, 1959.

⁸⁷ "Tvorcheskii poisk—prezhde vsego," *Literaturnaia gazeta* April 9, 1960.

Of course, radio was also received in the home in major cities, including at the height of the Great Terror. In the late 1950s, however, the context of this domestic reception had changed: television workers and critics in the late 1950s were responding to a powerful critique of artificiality in language, which began shortly before Stalin's death and took on greater momentum after Khrushchev's speech to the 20th Party Congress. From the intellectual debates of the "thick" journals, to the mores of everyday interaction among young people, sincerity and authenticity became central themes in public and private discussions from the late 1950s onward.⁸⁸ In this context, it was expected that viewers would be intolerant of formulaic, official language in their homes, even when such language might have kept Soviet citizens glued to their radio sets under Stalin and especially during the war.

For television workers and critics caught up in these currents, television's visual nature also had a special role to play in exposing falsehood. Not only would the domestic setting of the television screen oblige television performers to act naturally, but its close-up view of their faces would allow viewers to assess the truthfulness of the performers' words and appearance much more effectively than they might if they were in the audience of a meeting, for example. This was not just a matter of proximity—the television camera would actually sharpen the viewer's gaze as an "x-ray of character." Once again, Vladimir Sappak articulated this claim most eloquently, in a famous paean to Valentina Leont'eva. Although she remained strictly professional, Sappak wrote, "in her smile it's as if a curtain lifts up a little on her soul, and everything 'official' takes flight—a second of internal, lyrical contact between screen and viewer begins."⁸⁹ In Leont'eva's on-screen manner, Sappak saw a kind of improvisation much like that of the Youth Festival. "She acts on her own behalf...before us is not a strictly rehearsed event, checked against the stopwatch, but a live process being born before our eyes."⁹⁰ And here too, Sappak saw a merger between documentary and fictional art forms: the height of Leont'eva's art as a television announcer was that she was an actress who played herself. By contrast, when a famous actress appeared on television, dressed in a luxurious and low-cut dress, and began telling the audience that she had tried, in a recent film role, to create the image of a "humble working woman," viewers, Sappak claimed, had instantly sensed the irony of her remarks and appearance. Even in purely documentary capacity, television "demands authenticity and won't tolerate falsehood. It notices each false note...in other words, it sharpens our sense of truth."

In the next line, Sappak made the connection between this account of television's power and the intellectual currents of the avant-garde explicit. "It seems that very soon we will be able to speak about television in the words of Maiakovskii: '[it is] not a reflecting mirror, but—a magnifying glass'!" In this way, Sappak appropriated one of the most fundamental themes in Soviet culture—the achievement of "new vision" as a prerequisite for revolution—to the cause of de-Stalinization.⁹¹ The specific lies propagated by Stalin, as well as the general degradation of public speech they ostensibly ushered in, were, of course, the "falsehood" and "insincerity" at stake in 50s discussions

⁸⁸ Aleksandr Genis and Petr Vail', *60-e. Mir sovetskogo cheloveka*, 2nd ed. (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 1998), 68-71.

⁸⁹ Sappak, "Televidenie, 1960. Iz pervykh nabliudenii," *Novyi mir* 1960 No. 10, p. 179.

⁹⁰ Ibid. p. 180.

⁹¹ See Katerina Clark, *Petersburg*, 30-38.

of the need for authenticity in language, personal relationships, and most other aspects of life.

Sappak's claims for television brilliantly synthesize ideas drawn from the avant-garde, including those that were adopted into Stalinist art in the 1930s, and an optimistic ethos typical of the post-war era. It is no coincidence that the notion of television as an "x-ray of truth" strongly resembles the discourse surrounding the "unmasking" of enemies during the Great Terror, only with the values reversed.⁹² Although he avoids the word for "unmasking" that was widely used in the press during the Terror, *oblichenie*, Sappak substitutes the foreign-origin equivalent, *demaskirovat'*, in one of his 1961 essays. "Yes," he wrote, "the television screen unmasks [*demaskiruet*] insincerity."⁹³ Writing in the optimistic atmosphere of the thaw, Sappak saw this new, positive form of unmasking as a way to undo Stalin's legacy. The television camera would reveal champions and betrayers of transparency and sincerity. With the assistance of the all-seeing television camera and more frank modes of speech, moreover, the process of telling who was who had become much less fraught. What had changed was not the central categories or beliefs of Soviet culture, but the content—the people and places—that might fill those categories. This was one significant innovation of thaw culture: the self-assertion of a reinvigorated intelligentsia that claimed once again to be the pure center of Soviet culture, displacing the Party.⁹⁴

The intelligentsia on screen

Precisely for this reason, Sappak and many television workers and critics who shared his view felt that the persons who deserved to be subject to television's x-ray gaze were most often members of the intelligentsia. It was they who were best able to demonstrate the qualities Sappak had attributed to Leont'eva: the ability to be completely oneself on camera, to "improvise," to demonstrate logical and creative thinking in a way transparent to viewers. "Most needed, irreplaceable on television," Sappak wrote in 1960,

are the kind of people like Kornei Ivanovich Chukovskii [a poet and critic], like Iraklii Andronikov [a playwright and storyteller], like Ehrenburg [a writer and journalist], Iutkevich [a film director], Obraztsov [a puppet theater writer and director], Alpatov [an art critic], Shklovskii [a writer and critic]—those people, who not only have something to say, but who are able (and this is an unusual gift) to speak—no, think—freely and openly before the camera.

In Sappak's view, these individuals were characters "in an epic mode, whose inner selves...are in complete harmony with their outer selves and social roles," without interiority.⁹⁵ Television workers, themselves enamored with the intellectual celebrities of

⁹² Oleg Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia, a Study of Practices* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 181. See also Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Tear off the Masks! Identity and Imposture in 20th Century Russia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

⁹³ Sappak, *Televidenie i my*, 234.

⁹⁴ For more on the ambitions of thaw artists and especially journalists, see Zubok, 140-149; see also Thomas Wolfe, *Governing Soviet Journalism: the Press and the Socialist Person After Stalin* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005).

⁹⁵ See Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, 38.

those years, and responding to an audience still made up largely of educated Muscovites, created numerous programs that featured prominent intellectuals and artists as hosts and guests. These covered nearly every sphere of artistic activity, from the aforementioned *Television Journal “Art”* (1954) to *Cinepanorama [Kinopanorama]* (1962), to recurring broadcasts from the House of Actors in the late 1950s and early 1960s that eventually came to be known, from 1964, as *Theatrical Encounters [Teatral’nye vstrechi]*, and numerous programs featuring writers reading from their work.

As Leont’eva’s example suggests, however, for Sappak the *lichnosti* most suited to television were not limited to members of the artistic intelligentsia. In an essay written in 1961, Sappak proposed another list of people ideally suited to television’s “microscope of truth,” including more conventional Communist heroes. “Very much needed are exemplary people [*liudi-premery*] like the communist with a crystal soul Julius Fučik, like the strong young woman Anne Frank, like the French doctor Alain Bombard...and like the man who achieved the ‘feat of the century,’ Yuri Gagarin.” But the television staff and intelligentsia observers debating and developing Sappak’s ideas in the early 1960s were quick to point out that only a few such individuals were capable of conveying their off-camera heroism in the unnatural circumstances of a television interview.⁹⁶ Irakl’ Andronikov described the problem in a lengthy article in *Literaturnaia gazeta* in 1961.⁹⁷ “In order to speak before an audience,” he wrote, “you need to have a very important quality—the ability to **think publicly** [emphasis in the original]. This is difficult, because a speaker often gets nervous before a large or new audience.” If the speaker was able to overcome his nerves, however, his sincere and unconstrained gestures and facial expressions could “increase the range of the spoken word, reveal more and more new reserves of meaning, make speech unusually accessible, graphic, expressive, and emotional.”⁹⁸ To Andronikov, a frequent guest on both radio and television, television took another step beyond radio in its ability to perfect communication: its ability not only to convey the improvisation and intonation of live speech, but also to make visible gesture and facial expression, was the realization of Maiakovskii’s vision of the complete conveyance of poetic intent through readings by the poet-author himself on air.

For Andronikov, however, the most important feature of improvised, live speech was that it would allow for a new kind of intimate, personal communication in stark contrast to the scripted communication that was the only safe public speech under Stalin. With all the tools of live speech, particularly intonation, with its subversive power to undermine or entirely reverse the meaning of a given text, human communication would gain a quality akin to that of the informal, intimate *kompanii* in Moscow apartments during these years.⁹⁹ As Andronikov explained, “The ‘meaning of sounds’ is intonation, which conveys the most delicate tones of thought. That’s why the exchange of thoughts and mutual understanding between people is achieved more easily in conversation than

⁹⁶ It did not help matters that two of the people Sappak named as ideal television personalities, Frank and Fučik, were dead.

⁹⁷ Andronikov first appeared on television in 1954, but his appearance in the 1959 television film “*Zagadka N.F.I.*” established his reputation as a telegenic storyteller and scholar. A. Iurovskii, *Televidenie—poiski i resheniia. Ocherki istorii i teorii sovetskoi telezhurnalistiki* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1983), 128.

⁹⁸ Irakl’ Andronikov, “*Slovo napisannoe i skazannoe*” *Literaturnaia gazeta* 18 April, 1961, p. 3.

⁹⁹ On the *kompanii*, see Liudmila Alexeeva, *The Thaw Generation: Coming of Age in the post-Stalin Era* (Boston: Little and Brown, 1990).

through written correspondence.”¹⁰⁰

Like Sappak, Andronikov was describing television as a medium that would increase the power of communicators to influence their audience—the failings of a stilted, written media culture under Stalin had been tactical as well as ethical. In the context of television, at least, the thaw discourse of sincerity and authenticity was mustered in service of enhancing ideological power. Television, peopled by master communicators who believed in the message they were conveying, could win viewers’ trust and engage them on the most direct level possible, as an intimate friend. This vision did concede that viewers had to be reached on their own terms, in ways that were persuasive to them. Unlike a Party agitator at a public meeting, the television set could be turned off by viewers without repercussions; with the end of the war and the death of Stalin, the content of state messages was also no longer a matter of personal life or death.¹⁰¹ Yet the idea that the person on screen was a “guest” in the home was intended not to propose limits on the ambitions of communicators in the private lives of viewers, but rather to enhance their ability to influence them.¹⁰² The visual acuity that Sappak claimed television granted to viewers was not only a check on falsehood in public discourse, but a source of intimate connection with viewers.

It is here that we can observe an important distinction between the Soviet and American versions of this story: although television enthusiasts in both places recognized this potential power, it generated somewhat more anxiety in the United States. American television enthusiasts placed far less emphasis on the impact on viewers of seeing model people on screen, largely because that power was seen as a profound danger, one that shaped the infamous paranoia surrounding who could appear on American television during the 1950s. As Thomas Doherty has observed, McCarthy’s anticommunist activism focused on the banning of particular individuals from the screen, rather than on the meaning of particular texts—television’s power to convey unspoken meanings, in a person’s intonation, gesture, and facial expressions, made the text irrelevant.¹⁰³ Andronikov’s observation that these visual and aural factors could even entirely reverse the meaning of the spoken text was precisely what McCarthyism feared.

The flipside of this fear of television’s power to promote particular individuals was of course recognition of the potential value of becoming the subject of its x-ray gaze. Government agencies, most notably the State Department, pressured the television networks to feature government officials in flattering interviews.¹⁰⁴ After a bumpy start, politicians running for President assumed their place as the most important model people

¹⁰⁰ Andronikov, “Slovo napisannoe i skazannoe.”

¹⁰¹ For the party’s reservations about television in comparison with face-to-face agitation, see Roth-Ey, “Finding a home for television,” 288-290. In 1956, Central Television began to broadcast on two channels, giving viewers another way of avoiding an unpleasant television personality without even turning off the set.

¹⁰² The whole idea seems a bit of a fiction, given that most Muscovites in the late 1950s and early 1960s were still living in communal apartments, which offered little space for private life and where surveillance and informing by neighbors were commonplace. Notably, the idea that television was a “guest in the home” was also very widespread in U.S. discussions of television; there too it was used in the service of television executives’ goals—sales pitches needed to be subtle in order to avoid alienating viewers and losing the chance to sell to them at all. Baughman, 4; Boddy, “Fifties Television,” 19-20.

¹⁰³ Doherty, 24.

¹⁰⁴ Bernhard, 76-77. Much like Soviet Party officials, however, State Department officers feared being embarrassed on live air; they also found the popular, commercial medium beneath their dignity.

on American television, and their “sincerity” and “authenticity” continue to be rigorously examined and debated by viewers and journalists today.

Soviet officials were even more reluctant and unsuccessful in their adoption of television as medium than their American colleagues.¹⁰⁵ Soviet journalists, however, like their American colleagues, were quick to embrace new and prominent roles on television. We can see this most clearly in the writings of television workers, who saw a role for themselves alongside the artistic intelligentsia, as “exemplary people” on screen. For them, television’s x-ray vision was a call to professionalization. If Valentina Leont’eva could serve as a “crystal soul” for television while reading from a script, then surely a journalist pronouncing his own words would be even better. Like the Youth Festival reporting team, with its improvised speech, television workers began to discover and seek out more prestigious, personal, and active roles on screen. As they defined these roles, they spoke and wrote explicitly about the craft of appearing sincere in order to connect with viewers.

Television workers on screen: the 1958 Brussels World Expo

Television workers’ rising ambitions in this period, already evident in Yuri Fokin’s feats of live reporting from outside the studio in 1955-57 and especially during the Youth Festival, were part of a larger trend in Soviet journalism during the thaw, which mirrored developments in the West. In the U.S. and Western Europe, journalists in the 1950s appeared on screen in increasingly active roles that quickly made them famous. The high-stakes geopolitics of the Cold War demanded more of journalists than simply the recitation of facts; in response, radio and television journalists recast themselves as intellectuals, experts who could give meaning to events and help viewers orient themselves in the changing political landscape.¹⁰⁶ In the Soviet Union, a new generation of journalists qualified to comment on foreign affairs, the *mezhdunarodniki*, were gaining prominence in the press and on the radio during the 1950s. In 1957-58, journalists gained their own “union,” a professional organization akin to those established under Stalin for writers and visual, theatrical, and cinematic artists.¹⁰⁷

The assumption of more prominent on-air roles by television journalists, however, took place somewhat after these changes in radio and print journalism, and was in part driven by exposure to Western television, where program hosts and commentators played a far larger role on screen than their Soviet counterparts in the late 1950s. Although Soviet television workers had always had some sense of television in Europe and the United States, through access to foreign publications and especially the stories of colleagues and friends who traveled abroad, their first major direct exposure came in 1958, when the first group of television workers to be sent abroad traveled to Brussels for the 1958 World Expo. The group, made up of cameramen, editors, directors, and announcers, was to set up and staff a working television studio within the Soviet pavilion of the exhibition.¹⁰⁸ The team arrived almost a month in advance of the exhibition’s

¹⁰⁵ Roth-Ey, “Finding a Home for Television in the USSR, 1950-1970,” 278.

¹⁰⁶ Doherty, 85.

¹⁰⁷ Wolfe, 39.

¹⁰⁸ The dictors had passed a test of their foreign language skills, since they would be responsible for broadcasting in French or English. Svetlana Zhil’tsova, a regular Central Television dictator, had won one of the places on the team, but was denied permission to leave the country and was replaced at the last minute by a stewardess, Maria Malysheva. *Shabolovka* 53, 160.

opening, so there was plenty of time to experience life in Brussels. But, as L. Glukhovskaia remembers, despite the tempting colors of city life all around them, they often chose to experience Europe indirectly, via the small, black-and-white European television screen.¹⁰⁹ Glukhovskaia remembers being surprised by what they saw: European television both carried less cultural programming—far fewer broadcasts direct from theaters, almost no recent movies—and seemed less concerned about discovering television’s own artistic principles—shows in “conversational” genres, anathema to those trying to make television televisual, predominated.

But most surprising of all, according to Glukhovskaia, was the leading role granted to television journalists on screen. Over the course of the preparations and the exhibition itself, the Soviet television workers could watch the European TV teams at work among the exhibits. “We were overwhelmed,” she wrote, “by the unaccustomed diversity of jobs for commentators.

Our acquaintance with so many European television commentators was for all of us a clear lesson for the future. Their mastery, their technique in plying their craft were worth studying, not least because at the Central Television Studio in 1958 we didn’t have even one commentator on staff!¹¹⁰

The European commentators impressed Glukhovskaia and her colleagues with their ability to create fully realized, “dramaturgically structured” programs while seeming to use only interviews with randomly selected people on the street and broadcasting, of course, live. Over the course of the exhibition, they gained insight into the methods the Europeans were using—for one broadcast, they had scrupulously prepared portraits of particular colleagues working in the various national pavilions, but interspersed them with unplanned mini-interviews with passersby to create the feeling of complete spontaneity.¹¹¹ Of course, “complete spontaneity” was not possible for Central Television directors in this period, as the example of *VVV* had made clear.

Still, the “feeling” of spontaneity remained a viable goal for Soviet television journalists. Glukhovskaia’s memoir suggests how the craftsmanship of the European television reporting teams offered Soviet television workers a second path to higher status on the air, not solely as model individuals, but as directors, actively bringing out or constructing the meaning and dramatic logic of their subject. In this version, the art of the television commentator included several diverse skills. On the one hand, Glukhovskaia admired the European commentators’ careful planning and preparation, as well as their skillful, creative selection of particular people or examples from a body of extensive research. On the other, the best commentators, including the French reporter Leon Zitrone, were also skilled interlocutors and listeners, asking precisely the right question and bringing out the person being featured.¹¹² As Glukhovskaia remembers, Zitrone listened to his subject “with concentration and without any false emotionality, as if absorbing the interviewee’s every word and simultaneously rewarding and encouraging

¹⁰⁹ L. Glukhovskaia “Briussel’ EKSPO-58,” in *Shabolovka* 53, 160.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 161.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² The Soviet team’s communication with Zitrone was fostered by the fact that he was a native Russian-speaking White émigré, who emigrated to France from Petersburg with his family in 1920, at the age of six.

him with his gaze.”¹¹³ In this role, the television commentator might be on screen and in a prominent, prestigious role, but he or she was also clearly there to facilitate the viewer’s acquaintance with another person, who was the true subject of the program. This version of the television commentator’s role, balancing a sense of pride in professionalism with subordination to the interview subject as the real focus of television’s “microscope of truth,” had, as it turned out, a bright future. As television’s reach and prestige grew, so too did the interest and concern of the Communist Party’s highest leadership. And, like the creative intelligentsia and television workers themselves, they had particular ideas about what kinds of people television ought to propagandize.

The 1960 Central Committee decree on television

The Party leadership’s first public intervention in the debate about television’s nature and purpose took place only in 1960, when on January 29 the Central Committee published its first explicit statement about television’s future, the decree “On the future development of Soviet television.”¹¹⁴ As Kristin Roth-Ey has observed, this was a rather belated response given television’s rapid expansion.¹¹⁵ According to the decree itself, in 1960 there were over four million television sets in the Soviet Union, and a network of 70 television centers and rebroadcasting towers reached a territory encompassing 70 million people.¹¹⁶ This expansion had entailed a substantial investment in television technology, and the decree laid out the Central Committee’s expectations not only for Central Television, but for local television studios and recalcitrant local Party officials and existing Soviet arts organizations, who were still failing to cooperate fully with the new medium.

What the 1960 decree on television reveals, however, is the surprising extent to which the Central Committee in January 1960 agreed with the basic premises about television’s *form* being outlined in the press by television critics and put into practice by television workers. Where they differed was on the question of *what* and *who* was to be shown, not *how*. After a few opening paragraphs describing television’s impressive growth and important place alongside the print media and radio, the January 29 decree began with a list of the things television was not promoting sufficiently: the achievements of the Soviet people in political, economic, and cultural life, the Soviet builder of communism, and new methods and initiatives in labor and in raising Soviet living standards, which television could spread to a large audience. When the decree turned to concrete orders and measures for improvement, the first item was as follows: “In order to improve television from the ground up...the Central Committee indicated [*ukazal*] that the main task of television is the promotion of the decisions of Party Congresses and Plenums of the Central Committee, domestic and foreign policies of the Soviet state, the Soviet Union’s fight for a peaceful resolution of international questions, successes in the building of communism,” and so forth down the line.

These calls for changes in television’s content were to be accompanied, however, by improvements in its form, very much along the lines called for by Sappak and others

¹¹³ Glukhovskaia, 162.

¹¹⁴ The text of the decree is available in *KPSS o sredstvakh massovoi informatsii i propagandy*, second supplemented edition (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo politicheskoi literature, 1987), 539-545.

¹¹⁵ Roth-Ey, “Finding a Home for Television,” 287-88.

¹¹⁶ *KPSS o sredstvakh*, 540.

within Central Television. There should be more reportage, but from rural areas and regions outside Moscow. Although the document did not quite use the word “improvisation,” it did note that television conversations were not (and should be) “intimate” [*zadushevnyi*] or “uninhibited” [*neprinuzhdennyi*], both words that appeared frequently in articles in *Literaturnaia gazeta* and Sappak’s work. Television was also failing to show enough “examples of the development of new, communist relations in production and in life.”¹¹⁷ Finally, the document criticized television workers for copying cinema and theater, and for not devoting enough attention to “the creation of various types and forms of artistic programs specific to [*svoistvennykh*] television.”¹¹⁸

The January 29 decree thus proposed a rebalancing of who appeared on television. There should be more discussions with “leading people of industry and agriculture, ministers and their vice-ministers, directors of Party, state, and social organizations, and state farms,” as well as “editors of newspapers and journals, leaders [*deiatelei*] of science, literature, and art.”¹¹⁹ Underlying this proposal was not only the Party’s interest in promoting economic achievement and increasing its own prestige and responsiveness (television stations were obliged by the decree to host regular programs in which Party officials or ministers would answer questions from the population), but also a different sense of who television’s typical viewer was, or should be. The expansion of Soviet television’s audience by 1960 was another motivating factor behind the publication of this decree. “Television opens great new possibilities,” it proclaimed, for the daily political, cultural, and aesthetic development [*vospitanie*] of the population, including those of its layers that are the very least reached by mass-political work.”¹²⁰ Those least reached by mass-political work meant, primarily, workers, collective farmers, and viewers in remote regions, where Party agitators were thin on the ground and poorly trained, and copies of *Pravda* could arrive as much as a week after their publication date.

Sappak had a quite different view of the nature of the television viewer: it was the person assumed by Leont’eva’s on-screen manner. Her interlocutor on the other side of the screen, Sappak wrote, “is a wise and clever [*umnyi i legkii*] person, possessed of a sense of humor...and like a thoroughly modern man values such qualities as independence of judgment, the ability in any circumstances to remain himself.”¹²¹ In other words, the “people-examples” on screen mirrored those in their audience.

An idealistic view of the mass television audience also underlay Pat Weaver’s policies at NBC. For Weaver, the great aim of television during the Cold War was to transform its audience into an “all-people elite”—a goal he referred to as “NBC’s grand design”—and the United States into a society where “every man is an Athenian.” “To program for the intellectual alone is easy,” he declared in 1955, but “to make us all into intellectuals—there is the challenge.”¹²² Although the role of intellectual master communicators, talking one-on-one with viewers, was not emphasized in the U.S. the way it was in the Soviet Union, Weaver did imagine the artist/intellectual at the center of

¹¹⁷ *KPSS o sredstvakh*, 540.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 541.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 542.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 540.

¹²¹ Sappak, “Televidenie, 1960. Iz pervykh nabliudenii,” *Novyi mir* 1960 No. 10, 178.

¹²² Baughman, 106.

television's role in transforming society: high culture on screen would create intellectuals in the audience, overcoming the tyranny of distance, which was also the tyranny of social class.¹²³ As Weaver saw it, television technology would radically redistribute the riches of culture. "Eyes that a generation ago would have rarely strayed above the ground because of status or class or other misfortune," he declared in 1955, "now see anything that the richest, the most privileged, the most cultured man in any state of society could ever see for himself."¹²⁴

Weaver's hope that high culture content would quickly create its own demand and eliminate television's conflict between public service and commercial sponsorship was rapidly dashed. His expectation that most viewers already were or would rapidly become intellectuals met a similar fate.¹²⁵ Soviet debates about the kind of audience television's producers ought to imagine followed a similar course. Sappak did not specify whether the ideal viewers he described were already present—whether all Moscow TV watchers were like him—or whether the artistic intelligentsia on screen would gradually transform viewers in their own image. Since so much of his television aesthetics was built around his personal viewing experience, Sappak did not explore the problem of the actual audience, and by the mid 1980s this point had become an important criticism of his work. In a collection of essays on early television criticism published in 1985, for example, one astute Soviet critic observed that the location of the "new vision" in Sappak's description of television was primarily in Sappak's own politically and aesthetically trained eye.¹²⁶

A skeptical attitude toward the transformation of the average television viewer (and of Soviet reality as a whole) was already beginning to dominate among Party officials and many television workers by the mid 1960s. This, together with an increasingly explicit message from the Party bosses that television needed to lionize worker heroes at least as much as artistic ones, helped promote the idea that television journalists on screen were there as artists of a different kind than Sappak's Leont'eva. They were directors and portrait artists working with an unusually intractable medium—heroes drawn from the working masses, whose speech and manner might not resemble those of ostensibly epic, transparent individuals like Leont'eva, or Chukovskii. In the Union of Journalists' professional journal, *Sovetskaia pechat'*, an extensive debate began about the art of "revealing" [*raskrytie*] the transcendent and admirable qualities of a prize-winning collective farmer, whose on-screen appearance might not naturally communicate those qualities.¹²⁷

In 1961, however, this reaction was the most distant dark cloud on a brilliant horizon. The exuberance of television workers about their own roles on screen, playing themselves as model people and ingratiating themselves as friends and guests of every

¹²³ Similar ideas shaped the famous appearances of leading philosophers on French television. Tamara Chaplin, *Turning on the Mind: French Philosophers on Television* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ Baughman, 106.

¹²⁶ Iu. Bogomolov, "Sud'ba kontseptsii priamogo TV," in *Televidenie v zerkale kritiki*, 118.

¹²⁷ See for example, I. Andronikov, "Ustnoe slovo v efire," *Sovetskaia pechat'* #4 (April 1961): 37; L. Tarasov, "Chelovek i sobystie," *Sovetskaia pechat'* #1 (January 1963): 31-34; A. Makarov, "Sem' dnei v chetverg," *Sovetskaia pechat'* #5 (May 1964): 39-41. *Sovetskaia kul'tura* also took up this theme in a series of articles: R. Boretskii, "Okno v bol'shoi mir," *Sovetskaia kul'tura* 8 June 1963; P. Il'in, "A vse-taki smotrim!" *Sovetskaia kul'tura* 6 April 1963.

Soviet family, was captured in the first meeting of what would become an annual event, the “Seminar on reportage” [*seminar po reportazhu*] or, in fine Soviet acronym style, *Sempore*] in Tallinn in 1961. Taking up their role as part of the leading television studio in the Soviet Union, Central Television staff, including Leont’eva and Yuri Fokin, delivered speeches to an audience of television directors, journalists, and editors from studios all over the Soviet Union. If in 1958 there had been no commentators at Soviet Central Television, leaving Glukhovskaia and her colleagues to wonder at the diversity and skill of the European television commentators they met in Brussels, by 1961 Fokin could speak as a celebrated television commentator himself and an authority on the profession.

What for Sappak happened in the relationship between an ideal person on screen and viewer almost magically, for Fokin was the result of careful craft. Fokin gave the audience of local studio workers detailed instructions on how to tailor their behavior on screen to maximize viewers’ engagement. The first key step to gaining viewers’ trust and attention was to speak honestly and authentically, and take on an intimate tone appropriate to the living room. “In your appearance, your manner, your work with people, your conversations with others in the studio,” he told them,

you must be not only very direct, as Valentina Mikhailovna [Leont’eva] said, but also very charming and intimate. If you make contact with people, if you can speak thoughtfully, find them exactly in your sights, make exact contact, then an invisible spindle [*os’*] will appear between your crystal lens and your invisible interlocutor, and then things will go just great for you...if aren’t didactic in your manner, if you don’t use stereotyped phrases, then they will believe you.¹²⁸

Truthfulness and sincerity were explicitly connected to the objectives of the Party—in order to serve as a commentator, “who brings meaning to events,” not just a “reporter who only talks about [them],” the television worker’s honesty had to extend to his political orientation.¹²⁹ “The commentator reflects and bears the entire party-mindedness, all the positions and tasks standing before our party,” Fokin told the assembled audience. “It is he who holds in his mind all the passion of Soviet party-minded journalism.”

Fokin had just informed his audience that he, unlike Valentina Leont’eva, did not use the Stanislavsky method, since he was not trained as an actor. And yet, the idea that commentators had to truly believe in the message they were presenting was an essential part of Stanislavsky’s theory of acting. In *My Life in Art*, Stanislavsky wrote about the necessity that the actor believe in what he is performing: “the actor must first of all believe in everything that takes place on the stage, and most of all he must believe in what he himself is doing. And one can only believe in the truth.” In the face of the artificiality of everything around him on stage, the props and bright lights, the truth was to be found inside the actor himself: “I speak of the truth of emotions,” Stanislavsky wrote, “...I am interested in the truth that is within myself, the truth of my relation to this or that event on stage.”¹³⁰

¹²⁸ “Stenogrammy zasedaniia sektsii telereportazha vsesoiuznogo tvorcheskogo soveshchaniia po voprosam reportazha v radioveshchanii i televidenii,” March 1-2, 1961, GARF f. 6903 op. 1 d. 712 ll. 15-16.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.* 28-29.

¹³⁰ K.S. Stanislavsky, *My Life in Art*, trans. J.J. Robbins, 2nd ed. (New York: Meridian Books, 1957), 465.

This activist position for the television commentator, deeply rooted in the Stanislavsky method whose basic principles Sappak had revived for the television screen, seems at first glance to be uniquely Soviet—de-Stalinizing, insofar as the commentator was an intelligentsia figure vested with real authority, but also deeply rooted in Soviet artistic traditions from the 1920s and 1930s. And yet, Fokin’s comments strongly resemble the kind of advice that might be given to an American rookie news anchor or a politician trying to make his television appearances more effective—act natural, speak to the viewer as you would to a friend, believe in what you’re saying.¹³¹

Conclusions

An influential group of Central Television staff and sympathetic critics saw television as a medium that could make artists and intellectuals the heroes of the airwaves and transform audiences in their image, make politics transparent and everyday life as exciting as a soccer game. The flourishing of this vision was, however, made possible partly by early television’s smallness and relative isolation from the pressures of audience tastes and state intervention. Central Television workers were aware of and attentive to the responses of their small, urban, educated Moscow audience during the 1950s, but they learned about that audience mainly through word of mouth from their personal social networks, or through individual viewers’ phone calls to the studio.¹³² They were substantially less accountable to their audience than they would soon be forced to become. Before the mid 1960s, there was little pressure from Central Television’s leadership to study viewer letters systematically or to learn about the audience’s viewing habits through telephone polls and surveys. A different, but parallel, situation allowed for the flourishing of this same vision in the U.S. a decade earlier. Cold War pressures allowed NBC’s president Pat Weaver to push for television programming that would enlighten. But he was also taking a leap of faith that the high-culture content he was offering—serious live drama, irregularly scheduled “spectaculars” featuring opera singers alongside well-known entertainers—would draw viewers, despite evidence to the contrary from the history of radio. As greater evidence of audience tastes and preferences—particularly their preference for regularly scheduled shows and their indifference to liveness—accrued over the course of Weaver’s tenure at NBC, his ambitious project had to be modified.

A related process can be seen in the case of Soviet television. As Kristin Roth-Ey has shown, the Party was slow to weigh in on the television enthusiasts’ claims about television’s nature, or to voice its own objectives for television.¹³³ It was precisely the Party’s slowness to articulate its own uses for television that allowed television enthusiasts at Shabolovka and among the artistic intelligentsia to discover television as a medium that might realize some of the dreams of the avant-garde and serve their objectives during the cultural upheaval of the thaw. With the actual audience nearly irrelevant (mainly because original television content still made up only a tiny fraction of the daily television schedule in the late 1950s and early 1960s), the most important

¹³¹ For a discussion of the emergence of “sincerity” as a concern in the public/private performances of radio and television, see Paddy Scannell, *Radio, Television, and Modern Life: a Phenomenological Approach* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 58-74.

¹³² *Shabolovka* 53, 92.

¹³³ Roth-Ey, “Finding a Home for Television,” 278-281.

audience for their experiments was themselves, and they formulated theories about audience response and influence based substantially on their own tastes.¹³⁴

The dream of the television enthusiasts in the 1950s (and early 1960s, in the Soviet case) was to offer viewers special events that broke out of the ordinary, offering transformative possibilities to see new places, participate in world events, and meet important people eye to eye. Each of these programs, even ones that appeared every day, like Valentina Leont'eva reading the news, had the potential, they felt, to bring about a personal revelation in the individual viewer. In the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, Soviet television's Party leadership began to see another form of power television might offer—its ordinariness, its presence as a parallel universe governed by the same daily rhythms as our own. As one scholar of U.S. television concluded in the early 1980s, "the salient impact of television comes not from 'special events' ... but from day-to-day exposure. The power of television resides in its normalcy; it is always there at the push of a button."¹³⁵ The end of the television "golden ages" was marked not only by the decline of great hopes for television as a medium for the transformation of the viewing audience, but also by the decline of the conviction that television viewing was most powerful when it interrupted routines and defied schedules. And yet, the enthusiasts' vision of television remained powerful and influential in the Soviet Union—not only at holiday times, but in the course of the most routine evening schedule, anchored by news programs that still sought to engage viewers intimately, transport them live to the scene of events, and submit prominent individuals to their scrutiny.

The apex of the Soviet television golden age: 1961-1962

By the early 1960s, television enthusiasts could bask in the glory of significant accomplishments. Supported by a second wave of liberalization and a new Chairman of the State Television and Radio Committee with powerful connections to the Khrushchev family, Central Television staffers were making programs that they would remember as the best they ever made, the ones that truly fulfilled television's potential.¹³⁶ Yet, the enthusiasts were about to face a new set of challenges. The expansion of Central Television's audience to include a large provincial population, and the expansion of its cadres to include new workers who did not necessarily share the enthusiasts' values, made it difficult for television workers to continue to take themselves as their own most important audience.

Around 1961, these challenges were temporarily offset by important victories and dramatic events. It was a euphoric year in Soviet history generally. That spring, Yuri Gagarin flew into space; that fall, at the 22nd Party Congress, Khrushchev had Stalin removed from the mausoleum on Red Square and announced that the "current

¹³⁴ This is a classic mass communicator fallacy—confusing the viewer with oneself. It was also typical of U.S. television idealists; see Baughman, 106. It is difficult to measure audience opinion during these years given the informal nature of audience feedback, but the consistency of calls for better movies and plays on television, in the press and in the viewer letters that have survived, suggests that audiences were at least as interested in "home delivery" of movies as they were in original programming. For example, see the articles in note 21, and "Bol'she vnimaniia televideniiu! Obzor pisem chitatelei," *Pravda*, 22 January 1956.

¹³⁵ David Marc, *Demographic Vistas: Television in American Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984), 5-6.

¹³⁶ M.A. Kharlamov, appointed as Chairman of *Gosteleradio* in 1962, was a close friend of the Khrushchev family, http://www.tvmuseum.ru/catalog.asp?ob_no=4623&page=4

generation” would live to see communism. Central Television was also clearly ascendant. Construction had begun on the massive Ostankino television center in 1960. In 1959 *Pravda* had begun printing the Central Television schedule in its daily editions, foreseeing a time when nearly everyone who could get a copy of *Pravda* or hear the radio could also watch Central Television, broadcasting from Moscow.¹³⁷

Central Television’s enhanced power and prestige by 1961 were clearly visible in its coverage of a festive occasion that resembled the Youth Festival in several ways: the live broadcast of Gagarin’s return to Moscow on April 12. Euphoric crowds, Gagarin’s youthful, telegenic face—it was another one of those special moments when the official script of Soviet history came true, and everyone’s behavior could be at once scripted and spontaneous, Party-minded and authentic.¹³⁸ If the Youth Festival broadcasts had been the first great Soviet television holiday, then Gagarin’s arrival was the second.¹³⁹ Once again, television cameras, with the help of over ten mobile broadcast stations, followed the path of a festive procession that wound its way like a conquering army through Moscow’s streets. No longer confined to the crowded streets below (or standing on cars or crumbling rooftops to gain perspective) as they had been during the Youth Festival, a team of Central Television reporters took to the air in a helicopter loaned by the military.¹⁴⁰ Once again, international boundaries broke down as the whole world was gathered in Moscow, this time virtually.¹⁴¹ Television cameras, broadcasting not only to Soviet screens but to Eastern and even Western Europe and beyond via the newly established “Intervision” system, followed Gagarin’s progress from the air above Vnukovo airport to Red Square itself.¹⁴²

Once again, Sappak was in the audience at home. For him, like the Youth Festival, Gagarin’s arrival was a “glimpse through into the future.” Television made it possible to take this person—after returning from space, nearly a god—and

break through into him [*prorvat’sia*] to something internal, trustworthy, intimate, avoiding the pathos of the radio announcers, the crowded press conferences, the

¹³⁷ “Daty i sobytiiia” at the Virtual’nyi muzei radio i televideniya, http://www.tvmuseum.ru/search.asp?cat_ob_no=17&ob_no=17&a=1&pg=13. The first Central Television programs seen outside the Moscow region had been the Youth Festival broadcasts, which were recorded and sent by plane to Leningrad and Kiev for rebroadcast. Plans for a new television center, which would become the Ostankino tower, had begun in 1955 with a decree by the Soviet of Ministers; by 1960 construction at Ostankino had begun (construction was not completed until 1967-68, however). The 1955 *postanovlenie* was entitled “O rekonstruktsii Moskovskogo televizionnogo tsentra,” and issued July 15, 1955. See “Spravka “K zasedaniu Komissii Preziduma Soveta Ministrov SSSR po tekushchim delam”” from August 5, 1958 in GARF f. 6903 op. 1 d. 543 ll. 6-10;

¹³⁸ Eduard Sagalaev, who joined Central Television in 1975, recalls that even 15 years later the most prestigious beats for television reporters were those, like covering Soviet space exploration, where reporters could boast about Soviet achievements and also be telling the truth. Interview with Sagalaev, February, 2007.

¹³⁹ For a discussion and definition of television “media events” see Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz, *Media Events: the Live Broadcasting of History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992).

¹⁴⁰ Kuznetsov and Mesiatshev, “Zolotye gody,” Virtual’nyi muzei radio i televideniya, http://www.tvmuseum.ru/catalog.asp?ob_no=4623&page=3

¹⁴¹ Sappak, *Televidenie i my* (1968 ed.), 167.

¹⁴² Kuznetsov and Mesiatshev, “Zolotye gody,” Virtual’nyi muzei radio i televideniya, http://www.tvmuseum.ru/catalog.asp?ob_no=4623&page=3

stiff and measured [*arshinnye*] portraits on the first page of the newspaper.¹⁴³

As Sappak imagined it, television ideally captured Gagarin's status as "person-example" and conveyed it to viewers. Unlike the Youth Festival, where it was unclear who the heroes were—the multinational crowds? the television reporters themselves?—this was the progress of a single conqueror whose triumphant entry into Moscow restaged his recent conquest of the universe.

By definition, however, events like Gagarin's return from the cosmos did not happen every day. As television's audience and resources expanded at the beginning of the 1960s, television workers began to create programs that aimed to embody the television aesthetics of the late 1950s, but that would attract viewers repeatedly over time and become, ideally, a part of their weekly routines. These programs aimed at a broad audience, but they were also intended to meet different needs and interests, reaching that audience in distinct ways. In the few short months between fall 1961 and spring 1962, three iconic programs of the 1960s debuted, each of which would find (or re-found) a genre of television programming that would preoccupy Soviet television's executives and censors until 1991 and often beyond. They were, respectively, a game show, a news journal, and a variety show.

The game show was *Klub veselykh i nakhodchivkh* [Club of the Merry and Resourceful] or *KVN*, first broadcast on November 8, 1961. *KVN* was meant to reproduce *VVV*'s success with viewers and participatory form, while addressing the vulnerabilities that had led to the latter's cancellation: rather than featuring unpredictable audience contestants, *KVN* featured teams of students competing against one another in improvisational contests of wit. The news journal was *Estafeta novostei* [News Relay], a weekly news commentary program modeled on Western news journals, which first aired December 3, 1961.¹⁴⁴ The variety show was *Goluboi ogonek* [Little Blue Flame], which first appeared on April 6, 1962. The show gathered artists, musicians, television professionals, and model citizens from the colder world of politics and production in a studio decorated to look like a café; merry conversation alternated with musical and comedy performances.

All three of these programs were live (by intent as well as by technological necessity), all were intimate and conversational and aimed to draw viewers into participatory roles, and all granted a special place on screen to model persons and to television professionals themselves. All were also, despite being broadcast regularly (weekly in the case of *Estafeta novostei* and *Goluboi ogonek*), designed as television holidays. They were not bound by the rigors of the schedule: *KVN* matches could last three hours; *Estafeta novostei* was always broadcast at the end of the scheduling day so that its time would not be fixed or limited. *Goluboi ogonek* was broadcast on Sunday nights, and featured intimate lighting and emotional music designed to create a festive atmosphere.¹⁴⁵ They featured performers whose status as actors or real people was

¹⁴³ Sappak, *Televidenie i my* (1968 ed.), 168.

¹⁴⁴ Prior to 1961, television news had been limited to a show called *Poslednie novosti* [Latest News] which borrowed its format (an announcer reading TASS bulletins) and its content from radio's program by the same name.

¹⁴⁵ A pre-broadcast text of the 1962 New Year's Eve *Goluboi ogonek* featured the following stage directions: "Poet Ots...Snova panorama kafe...Vse slushaiut otlichnoe ispolnenie popularnoi pesni. I my vidim, kak pesnia vyrazhaet samye sokrovennye i samye blizkie chuvstva liudei, kotorye v etu noch'

ambiguous and made the borders between fiction and reality porous. Successful *KVN* players, real students, became famous and were hired as professional actors and comedians, and *Goluboi ogonek* constructed skits around the confusion between an actor's on-screen and real-life personas.¹⁴⁶ Even *Estafeta novostei*, a serious news journal, could get into the act: on New Year's Eve 1963 all three shows collaborated to make a seamless whole of their broadcasts—the players in a *KVN* team traveled to Leningrad to complete their final task live on *Goluboi ogonek* (relocated there as a holiday treat); while they were en route, *Estafeta novostei* interrupted its broadcasts to report on their progress.¹⁴⁷

Such a feat of coordination could only be accomplished with cooperation at the highest levels of government. And yet, despite this show of strength in 1963, the television enthusiasts were about to face a new set of challenges. The Central Committee, through a new Chair of the State Radio and Television Committee in 1964, began to insist on a more significant place for worker and collective farmer heroes on television. There was also pressure to create programming not just for the particular audiences who interested the television enthusiasts (youth, urban intellectuals) but for those same workers and collective farmers in Central Television's growing provincial audience. There were global pressures too. As the foreign radio "voices" continued to penetrate Soviet airwaves, it was not enough for Soviet television simply to exist as an alternative. Instead, the Central Committee began to take its own look at the Western television system for the secrets to its power. It found that the evening news in the West no longer looked much like Yuri Fokin's lengthy, intimate "conversations" with viewers on *Estafeta novostei*. Unlike live broadcasts of television events, serial films could be sold abroad for hard currency and bring larger foreign audiences for Soviet messages. In one early instance of globalization, the collapse of the "golden age" in American television—the rise of pre-taped programs that fit into a routinized schedule designed around viewers' daily habits—also threatened to undermine the central tenets of the Soviet television golden age.

To face these challenges, Soviet television's producers and censors drew on and adapted all of the currents in the thaw television aesthetics described in this chapter. Live broadcasting of the iconoclastic kind made notorious by the final episode of *VVV* may have disappeared from the air from the early 1960s through the mid-1980s. But it retained its place in risky live broadcasts of holiday parades and Party Congresses—those monumental moments that television's censors felt most resembled the communist future. Television did not become an art form in terms of its administrative status—it never gained its own artistic union, for example.¹⁴⁸ Yet the artistic criteria articulated during the late 1950s remained highly relevant throughout television's Soviet history, both as part of the professional identity of television workers and as a requirement from the Central Committee above.¹⁴⁹ In the 1970s, television workers still believed that

vstrechajut prikhod Novogo goda." GASF f. 6903, op. 26, d. 436, *papka* 4169.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ *KVN? KVN...KVN!*, 8. Kuznetsov and Mesiatsev quote E. Galperina remembering the same episode in "Zolotye gody," http://www.tvmuseum.ru/catalog.asp?ob_no=4623&page=3

¹⁴⁸ Television's performers, the dictors, were also denied, along with their radio colleagues, the very generous pensions offered to some Moscow theatrical and musical artists. See GASF f. 6903, op. 1, d. 623, ll. 163-166.

¹⁴⁹ See Neia Zorkaia "Formirovanie kontseptsii televizionnogo mnogoseriinosti" and Iu. Bogomolov

television could unify journalism and art, by “aesthetically giving meaning” [*esteticheski osmyslit*] to what was shown, and that pretaped reportage and television films could carry out the same artistic functions as live television had.¹⁵⁰ In 1982, Tatiana Vedeneeva, a young TV announcer, told the journal *Television and Radio Broadcasting* that “the [television] screen is a big magnifying glass. Everything is visible, even the things in life you usually don’t notice. If you don’t believe in the things you’re talking about, the viewer will never believe you,” echoing both Sappak and Fokin.¹⁵¹ Russian television historians and former television workers still divide Soviet television into “authored” television [*avtorskoe televidenie*] and all the rest, privileging the role of the television artist who created superior programs that reflected his or her unique talents and perspective. Sappak himself would have been pleased to learn that Valentina Leont’eva was awarded the status of People’s Artist of the Soviet Union on April 29, 1982.¹⁵² The third, fourth, and fifth chapters of this dissertation will tell the story of how each of these three shows and their genres—news, variety show, and gameshow—adapted to these new challenges, preserving and altering the television aesthetics of the 1950s and early 1960s to fit the times.

“Sud’ba kontseptsii priamogo TV” in *V zerkale kritiki*. Eduard Sagalaev recalls how Youth *redaktsiya* programs were obliged to justify themselves in terms of socialist realism’s artistic principles during the late 1970s. Interview with Sagalaev, Moscow, February 2007.

¹⁵⁰ A. Vartanov, “Problema vzaimootnoshenia dokumenta i obraza” in *V zerkale kritiki*, 77-80.

¹⁵¹ E. Krymova, “Prezhde vsego, iskrennost’,” *Televidenie, radioveshchanie* No. 4 (April, 1982), 13.

¹⁵² Leont’eva, *Ob ’iasnenie v liubvi: zapiski diktora Tsentral’nogo televideniya*, 2nd edition, *Mastera iskusstv—molodezhi* (Moscow: Molodaia Gvardiia, 1989).

Someone once said: the millions of televisions are like millions of royal theaters. The viewer is the king, and with one gesture of his hand he can cut short the presentation.¹

--V. Turbin, Director, Central Television Literature and Drama Programs Desk

Soviet Prime Time: Audience Research and the Creation of the Channel 1 Schedule

Chapter 2

In the mid 1960s, the construction of the Ostankino Television Center raised pressing practical questions about the content and schedule of what would soon become an all-Union broadcast channel, Central Television Channel 1. The arrival of Moscow's signal in roughly 70% of Soviet territory by 1967 transformed the role of local broadcasting and demanded a new understanding of television as a mass medium, reaching an enormously diverse audience.² Central Television would seek, like its European counterparts, to orient itself more fully toward its audience, with a regularized and recurring schedule that reflected viewers' own routines.³ Each decision about what to include in such a regular schedule, however, was itself predicated on a number of other decisions, about the relationship between cultural producers and cultural consumers, which groups of viewers it was most important to reach, and how to most effectively reach them.

The Ostankino Television Center was built, like other premier Soviet construction projects, with parts and labor from throughout the Soviet Union.⁴ The new all-Union television channel carried similar symbolic weight. Defining Channel 1 was a momentous technical, symbolic, and political task. Like other all-Union media, the channel had to fulfill a range of propagandistic goals, differentiate Soviet television from its capitalist counterparts, and choose between conflicting strategies for influencing the audience. Like the all-Union newspaper *Pravda*, Channel 1 could contain a little of every form of Soviet media content. Unlike *Pravda*, however, everything could not be available simultaneously. If the newspaper was limited by space, and its priorities conveyed spatially, television was limited by the hours when viewers might plausibly watch and had to convey its priorities temporally. The most political and difficult question of all, therefore, was how content would be organized into a daily schedule.

In part, the creation of a recurring schedule for Central Television was a question of professionalization. In the 1950s and at least into the first half of the 1960s, and to the chagrin of viewers, the Soviet television schedule was quite irregular and very frequently

¹ V. Turbin, *Rezhisser radio- i tele-teatra* (Moscow: Iskusstvo: 1983), 107.

² For the authoritative English-language account of the spread of television technology by the Soviet state, see Kristin Roth-Ey, "Finding a Home for Television in the USSR, 1950-1970," *Slavic Review*, Vol . 66, No. 2 (Summer, 2007): 278-306. See also Roth-Ey, "Mass Media and the Remaking of Soviet Culture, 1950s-1960s," Ph.D. Dissertation, Princeton University, 2003. By 1967, when the "Molnia" satellite began operation, Central Television reached 9 of 15 Union Republics and roughly 70% of the population, including much of Siberia, the Far East and Central Asia. Roth-Ey, "Mass Media," 265-266.

³ For the origins of the audience-oriented schedule at the BBC in the 1930s, see Paddy Scannell, *Radio, Television, and Modern Life: a Phenomenological Approach* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Books, 1996), 9-10.

⁴ Roth-Ey, "Mass Media," 265.

inaccurate.⁵ On her trip with Central Television colleagues to Brussels for the 1958 World Expo, L. Glukhovskaia was astonished to find that Belgian television closely followed a schedule printed in the national newspaper that featured the same programs at the same time each day: neither was true of Soviet television in 1958.⁶ To get a sense of the kind of schedule typical of Central Television in the late 1950s, take the following schedules for two Mondays in 1959:

Monday, July 13, 1959

6:00 pm. Children's program. Concert by the Minsk Palace of Pioneers song and dance ensemble
6:45 pm. "Bringing books to the masses"
7:15 pm. "Latest news"
7:30 pm. Lev Tolstoy's "Power of darkness", performed by the State Academic Little [Malyi] Theater. Afterwards, "Latest news"

Monday, October 12, 1959

7:00 pm. Children's program "Interesting meetings club"
7:30 pm. "Latest news"
7:45 pm. "A mission of peace and friendship"—Television account [*khronika*] of N.S. Khrushchev's arrival in the U.S.
9:15 pm. "The writer Leonid Leonov"—television essay [*ocherk*]. Afterwards, "Latest news."⁷

These schedules have a basic organization: a children's program, followed by a substantial artistic program, bracketed on either end by the short newsreader program *Latest news*. A directly propagandistic program usually preceded the first broadcast of *Latest news* but sometimes followed it if there was an event of unique importance, such as Khrushchev's visit to the United States. Yet these schedules were far from completely predictable for viewers, even when they were accurate. The second broadcast of *Latest news* had no fixed time, for example, remaining dependent on when the artistic program ended.

Yet making the Central Television schedule more regular and predictable was not just a bureaucratic task. Any change to "scheduling politics" [*programmnaya politika*], as Soviet TV producers called it, was also implicitly a change in approach to the audience.

⁵ Viewers complained that inaccuracies in the printed schedule made it impossible for them to plan their evening leisure as they wished. See for example a 1965 letter quoted in GARF f. 6903 op. 10 d. 66 ll. 131, 143. Many of the changes viewers objected to were the result of the difficulty Soviet television had with acquiring the rights to broadcast recently released movies and sporting events from their producers, who were loath to lose ticket revenues. See Roth-Ey, "Mass Media," 286-287.

⁶ The Central Television schedule began to be printed in *Pravda* alongside the radio schedule and weather report on the final page only in 1959. L. Glukhovskaia, "Briussel' EKSPO-1958" in *Shabolovka 53: stranitsy istorii televizionnaya* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1988), 160.

⁷ Schedules printed in *Pravda* on the dates given. By October, 1959, Central Television had begun broadcasting on a second channel; on October 12 the only program on that channel was an unspecified sporting event.

Soviet film, radio, newspaper, and book producers in the 1920s and 30s had faced similar questions about the relationship between their product and that product's audience.⁸ Measuring audience response is essential for any state or other entity that wishes to impose something on a group of people, but it posed unique problems in a state without a legitimate role for markets and without spontaneous politics. Soviet cultural products were always to be created "in the interest" of the Soviet people, but that interest could be defined in multiple ways: as enlightenment, as mobilization, or as the provision of consumer pleasures.⁹ The marketing of cultural products was further complicated by the fact that television shows, like movies, books, and radio, were a luxury, not a necessity.¹⁰ Their consumption was in most regards entirely voluntary, unlike attendance at political lectures organized in schools and workplaces, for example. If Soviet audiences did not like them, they would not buy them, or read them, or watch them, or turn their televisions on at all. And given the role that art and cultural products like these were supposed to play in the transformation of Soviet people and society (and the generous state subsidies which supported this work), it mattered whether people read, listened, and watched.¹¹

Within this broad framework, Soviet cultural producers in the 1920s and 1930s developed several approaches to the problem of how to account for audience demand in light of the Party's exclusive role as cultural "vanguard." One response was to imagine that everyone wanted to see, read, or listen to the things the state wanted them to see, read or listen to. And, if they did not, then these bad tastes excluded them from the legitimate audience in any case. When this approach seemed to doom cultural products to molder on the shelves, cultural producers argued that real audiences could be transformed into ideal ones. As Brian Kassof has shown, book publishers in the 1920s proposed that, without competition from lesser alternatives, the right books could create their own market by transforming audiences' tastes and creating an ideal audience where there had been none before.¹² A third response acknowledged that the media would need to engage the audience in order to enlighten or mobilize it. Enlightening or mobilizing content might be designed to appeal to the self-image and aspirations of a desired part of the audience, interspersed with popular music, or written in popular narrative forms. This entailed, of course, determining what music and which narrative forms were popular. That might be

⁸ See for example Matthew Lenoe, *Closer to the Masses: Stalinist Culture, Social Revolution, and Soviet Newspapers* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004); Stephen Lovell, *The Russian Reading Revolution: Print Culture in the Soviet and post-Soviet Eras* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000); Denise Youngblood, *Movies for the Masses: Popular Cinema and Soviet Society in the 1920s* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Emma Widdis, *Visions of a New Land: Soviet Film from the Revolution to the Second World War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003). See also the discussion "Audience and Society in the Post-Stalin Period" in *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 6, 4 (Fall 2005).

⁹ For the shift in objective from enlightenment under NEP to mobilization during the Great Break see Lenoe, *Closer to the Masses*, 11-45; For consumer values in Stalin-era and post-Stalin Soviet culture see Vera Dunham, *In Stalin's Time: Middleclass Values in Soviet Fiction* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976), and Susan Reid, "Cold War in the Kitchen: Gender and the De-Stalinization of Consumer Taste in the Soviet Union under Khrushchev," in *Slavic Review* 61, 2 (2002): 211.

¹⁰ I am indebted to the concise and witty observations about Soviet cultural production, consumption, and markets in Brian Kassof's excellent article on the Soviet book market, "The Market's Two Bodies," unpublished article presented at the East European Colloquium, Institut für Osteuropäische Geschichte und Landeskunde, University of Tübingen, Tübingen, Germany, June 2005

¹¹ Quoted in Kassof, "The Market's Two Bodies," 3.

¹² Kassof, 4.

accomplished by employing cultural producers who were themselves from the targeted groups, as in the case of Matthew Lenoe's worker journalists, whose tales of heroism and calls to action remade Soviet newspapers and novels.¹³ Or it could be found out, via meetings with the target audience, attention to their letters to state institutions, or rudimentary market research. The population could also be engaged as co-authors, as was the case, as Thomas Lahusen has shown, with the writing of Vasilii Azhaev's novel *Far From Moscow*.¹⁴ Finally, a fourth solution was to decide that in fact Soviet cultural products ought to please and entertain a large audience, even if that meant moving their enlightening or politically mobilizing messages into the background. There were many possible reasons to adopt this approach, including justifying the state's claims to represent the interests of regular people, competing with foreign cultural products, and the sense that having a good time should be a natural part of being a good Soviet citizen.

Although any medium might adopt any of these basic approaches at different times for different audiences, they were most sharply juxtaposed on Central Television, which encompassed almost every kind of Soviet cultural production, often within a single viewing day. Television had wire service news bulletins read by radio announcers, movies, plays, concerts, and even programs promoting reading. Moreover, because of its unique qualities as a medium and its place within the Soviet media as an institution, television was obliged to find new answers to the old question of the relationship between Soviet cultural producers and their audience. On the one hand, television was freer to ignore what was popular because it was not subject to the financial constraints faced by the film studios, concert halls, theaters, and book publishers, who were supposed to finance their own operations through ticket and book sales.¹⁵ But, on the other hand, television was also the state's best hope in the Cold War 1960s and 70s against the lure of foreign radio broadcasts, and it was terribly vulnerable to viewers' tyrannical power to simply turn off the set.¹⁶ As a result, it was powerfully compelled to attract as many viewers as it could. Yet, however ironic it may seem, many Soviet critics shared Western fears about television's pacifying, stupefying impact on society.¹⁷ Moreover, television became a mass medium not in the 1920s or 30s, but in the 1960s, in dramatically different circumstances than those in which Soviet cultural producers' existing approaches to the question of audience response had been conceived. Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin's cult of personality, and the aforementioned pressures of the Cold War demanded a renegotiation of the relationship between cultural producers and audience demand, one that was more attuned to popular tastes, yet also clearly distinct from American commercial broadcasting: a new "socialist" audience research to underlie a new all-Union Channel 1 schedule.

¹³ Lenoe, *Closer to the Masses*.

¹⁴ Thomas Lahusen, *How Life Writes the Book: Socialist Realism and Real Socialism in Stalin's Russia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997).

¹⁵ For the influence of profit motives on the development of audience research in the film industry, see Joshua First, "From Spectator to 'Differentiated' Consumer: Film Audience Research in the Era of Developed Socialism," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 9, 2 (Spring 2008): 317-44. See also Kassof, "The Market's Two Bodies."

¹⁶ Kristin Roth-Ey, "Finding a Home for Television in the Soviet Union, 1950-1970," *Slavic Review* 66, 2 (2007), 278.

¹⁷ Ibid.

In order to answer these demands, over the course of the 1960s Central Television staff created new ways of learning about their audience and intensified their practice of old ones. By 1968, when it relocated its operations to Ostankino, Central Television had found some answers to the question of how Soviet television should relate to its audience and laid the foundations for the kind of television broadcasting Ostankino made possible: it had created a recurring daily, weekly, and monthly television schedule that sought, during the most-watched evening and weekend hours—Soviet “prime time”—to gather the largest possible audience for Soviet television in general, and for a new evening news show, *Time [Vremia]*, in particular.

Learning about the television audience: model audiences

As Central Television began to think more seriously about television’s power to influence audiences in ways that went beyond the delivery of plays and movies to the home, it had to decide what kind of audience its programs ought to address. Should television address an ideal audience of viewers who lived up to the state’s claims about the Soviet populace, or the entire actual audience, whose tastes and demands did not always fit those claims? Should it attempt to reach the most viewers possible at a particular time, or instead target specific audiences who were more important to the state, such as youth or Party agitators? These questions were not unique to Soviet television—in the United States and Western Europe state-owned or state-regulated television producers faced similar dilemmas regarding the balance between enlightenment and mass entertainment and the desirability of targeting uniquely valuable (to advertisers, for example) audiences, versus reaching the largest viewership possible.

From its earliest years, Central Television’s staff learned about audience reactions to their programs via informal methods. TV staff knew of the immense popularity of one 1957 show, a quiz program called *Vecher Veselykh Voprosov (VVV)*, from conversations overheard in public transit, or opinions solicited by simply leaving the studio and stopping passersby. As one TV staffer assigned to report on *VVV*’s strengths and weaknesses during the summer of 1957 put it, “reactions are positive everywhere—in the tram, on the metro, in factories, in apartments—everyone is talking about *VVV*.” “After the most recent *VVV* broadcast,” he reported, “we went out into the streets and met with several people from different walks of life and they all spoke in the same [positive] terms about this new initiative on television.”¹⁸

Over the course of the late 1950s and early 1960s, Soviet television developed more active methods for reaching the television audience. These methods focused, however, primarily on particular model audiences who could stand in for the whole Soviet audience not as a representative sample, but as an ideal version of that audience.

The “Public Council of Television Viewers”

The first and least successful of these new methods was the creation, in 1959, of a Public Council of Television Viewers [*obshchestvennyi sovet telezritelei*]. Founded in the wave of enthusiasm for greater public involvement in state organizations and initiatives leading up to the 21st Party Congress in January, 1959, the Council was half advisory board, half permanent model audience. Comprised of representatives from

¹⁸ “Stenogramma letuchki rabotnikov Tsentral’nogo televideniiia” from June 14, 1957. GARF f. 6903, op. 31, d. 3, l. 13.

Moscow region factories, collective farms, scientific institutes, and educational institutions, the Council, initially made up of 27 members but soon expanded to 85, was meant to connect Central Television's content producers with the millions of television viewers by expressing opinions and providing feedback that would represent the latter's views.¹⁹

The Council of Television Viewers did have opinions, but it is difficult to say how representative those opinions really were. Transcripts of their meetings from the fall of 1960 indicate that their comments were sometimes based on their personal tastes and wishes, sometimes on a sense of their own role as elites guiding programming for a mass public distinct from themselves. One month, a Council member might complain about lengthy shots of the studio audience's reactions—a technique beloved by television producers who believed that seeing audience reactions helped transport viewers and connect them emotionally to the events on screen.²⁰ The Council's members could also set themselves apart from the larger television audience, with comments that identified them as elites crafting entertainments for the imagined masses. Typical of this view was one Council member's rhetorical question, "what will give the people a good laugh for the holidays? The holiday show must include dancing."²¹

Regardless of the usefulness of the information they provided, by December, 1960, Central Television producers were already sidelining the Council. In a December 14 meeting of the Council, staff from the Musical programs desk announced that an advance viewing of the New Year's holiday programs for Council members would take place only on December 25th and 28th, far too late for their opinions to be taken into account. Worse yet, the Musical Programming Desk staff appeared to see this showing as a sort of elite privilege, akin to screenings of limited release movies for Party members, and accompanied their announcement with condescending comments to the effect that perhaps the Council would be better off waiting to see the show on air, since they would enjoy it more if the surprise were not spoiled. Council members were outraged, and reminded the Central Television representatives that they were supposed to see these programs in their earliest, roughest version, so that they could suggest improvements.²² A few records of further meetings survive in the archives of the Central Television administration, including one as late as 1962, but they make clear that the group's discussions had been largely reduced to gripes about their own lack of influence.²³

Meetings with television viewers

Although the exact reasons for the Council of Television Viewers' demise are hard to determine, it seems plausible that the Council's appeal for Central Television's staff and leadership was limited. It was not truly representative of audience opinion, and

¹⁹ "Stenogramma zasedaniia obshchestvennogo soveta telezritelei," 13 January 1959. GARF f. 6903 op. 1 d. 612, 1.2.

²⁰ Similar complaints were common in viewer letters to Central Television. See for example GARF f. 6903 op. 10 d. 69 l. 65.

²¹ "Protokoly zasedanii obshchestvennogo soveta telezritelei pri Tsentral'noi studii televideniia," May 11-December 14, 1960. GARF f. 6903 op. 1 d. 666, ll. 7, 22.

²² Ibid., ll. 32-33.

²³ "Protokoly zasedanii obshchestvennogo soveta telezritelei pri Tsentral'noi studii televideniia," GARF f. 6903 op. 1 d. 770.

its permanence and sense of its own importance probably made it something of a nuisance for television producers.

A more flexible tool for gathering feedback from a broader range of audiences were ad hoc meetings between a few Central Television producers and a relatively large and diverse group of television viewers drawn from a factory or other institution. By the early 1960s, these meetings between television and radio staff and viewers/listeners had been taking place for over a decade, organized by a special office of the State Television and Radio Committee, the Scientific-methodological division [*Nauchno-metodicheskii otdel* (NMO)]. Founded quietly in the summer of 1944 as the “Scientific-methodological office [*kabinet*]” and staffed by only one person, the division gradually gained broader scope for activities in support of its 1944 mission, to “study methodological issues facing local and central radio broadcasting, promoting the spread of best practices learned by radio broadcast divisions, and studying the practices of foreign radio broadcasters.” In 1954, the Scientific-methodological “office” was promoted to the status of a “division”; in 1957 a new decree on its organizational mission included, for the first time, the obligation to “develop methods for studying the effectiveness of radio and television programs.”²⁴

In 1959, as part of the same wave of interest in increasing the responsiveness of state institutions to popular opinion that had led to the creation of the Public Council of Television Viewers, this aspect of the Scientific-methodological division’s work was made more explicit still. The NMO was to “organize and run, jointly with radio and the Central Television studio...meetings with radio listeners and TV viewers to acquaint them with the work and plans of all-Union radio and the Central television studio.” In fact, such meetings with audience members had been taking place since 1948, and had always been intended to gather feedback as well as to “acquaint” viewers with changes and new programs.²⁵

In the early 1960s, these meetings had become relatively frequent encounters between television staff and various audiences—the workers at a particular factory, most typically, although sometimes a more diverse audience was solicited at a public venue like the All-Union Exhibition of Economic Achievements (*VDNKh*), often as part of an exhibition on Soviet radio and television.²⁶ These meetings, which rather resemble the use of focus groups by marketers or the “town-hall meetings” favored by U.S. politicians, mainly sought to gather feedback from particular audiences on a range of topics. Discussions took place in large group assemblies and were thus far from unconstrained, but those present were not special delegates for the factory, and, as with letters, a range of critical comments were permissible. Meetings with viewers could also serve as a forum for the distribution of opinion surveys, a practice that began within the Central Television Studio on a very small scale as early as 1945.²⁷

Viewer letters

The study of letters was far from original to television, or to the post-war era. Letters were gathered, studied, and answered not only by other Soviet media and art

²⁴ “*Predislovie*,” GARF f. 6903 op. 3.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

forms, but by the state and Party directly at every level, from local Party organization to the Central Committee itself.²⁸ Central Television had, of course, received and taken account of viewer letters since its earliest days, including letters that were sent to newspapers or Party organizations rather than directly to Central Television. With the growth of Central Television's audience and the increase in Party scrutiny of its content and responsiveness to audience demands in the late 1950s, however, Central Television's treatment of viewer letters began to change. In 1957, the Central Television Studio gained its own "letters and work with the masses" bureau [*redaktsiia*], separate from radio's listener letter department.²⁹ This new letter bureau began to produce reports on television viewer letters, analyzing their number and distribution between the different content-producing bureaus, and providing samples of their content, including direct quotes from individual letters, as well as a textual summary of topics that received multiple letters.

Television producers working on particular shows were at least theoretically expected to respond to viewer complaints about their programs, both by implementing changes and by writing back to individual viewers. By 1960, the letters bureau was producing an annual report not only analyzing the viewer letters for the past year, but also providing statistics on how many letters individual program desks had answered in a timely manner (and chiding those content desks that had performed poorly).³⁰ Television viewers' complaints about larger problems with television broadcasts, such as interruptions and inaccuracies in the published broadcast schedule were discussed at internal staff meetings.³¹ Along with encounters with Western European and American television professionals and scheduling practices, these complaints probably helped drive the effort to establish a regular and accurate television schedule.

The letters bureau tabulated viewer letters in a manner resembling the treatment of sociological data, but letter writers were another kind of model audience, and Central Television responded to them as such.³² Viewers who identified themselves as Party

²⁸ For more on Soviet letter-writing practices see Denis Kozlov, “‘I have not read, but I will say’: Soviet Literary Audiences and Changing Ideas of Social Membership, 1958-66,” *Kritika* 7, 3 (2006): 557-597; see also Sheila Fitzpatrick, “Supplicants and Citizens: Public Letter-Writing in Soviet Russia in the 1930s,” *Slavic Review* 55, No. 1 (1996):78.

²⁹ “*Predislovie*”, GARF f. 6903, op. 10 “Otdely pisem Tsentral’nogo televideniiia, Tsentral’nogo vnutrisoiuznogo radioveshchaniiia, i Tsentral’nogo radioveshchaniiia na zarubezhnye strany.” In 1960, as part of the larger reorganization of Central Television, the letters bureau was made part of the main programming directorate [*Glavnaia direktsiia programm*], responsible for allocating broadcast time among the editorial desks [*redaktsiia*] and creating the schedule.

³⁰ Reports from 1957 and 1959 have not survived, and reports from 1958 are not complete; the 1960 annual report is the first surviving one to include statistics on letters answered. GARF f. 6903 op. 10 d. 24.

³¹ GARF f. 6903 op. 31 d. 3 l. 63.

³² As Ellen Mickiewicz has documented, letter writers belonged to the Communist Party in far higher percentages than the Soviet population as a whole. See Ellen Propper Mickiewicz, *Media and the Russian Public* (New York: Praeger, 1981), 121. The reports which the Letters Bureau produced were themselves selective in their attention—they focused primarily on letters with critical comments about television’s schedule and content, rather than on what they periodically noted were the far more numerous letters which asked for contact information or assistance with a personal problem, or which were responses to quizzes. Although it was relatively rare in the first half of the 1960s, they sometimes also highlighted the comments and perspective of particular subgroups of viewers whose letters supported the viewpoint of Central Television’s Party leadership on a particular question. See for example this 1963 report, which contained an unusual long discussion of a single letter from a high-ranking military official, asking for more attention

members and sent their letters about television directly to the Central Committee were handled more attentively, for example. The Central Committee archives have preserved several such letters and the detailed investigations and responses they could generate, even when their content strayed into the realm of the paranoid delusional.³³

The vast majority of letters from viewers contained not critical feedback but rather requests for the address of a medical clinic or model workplace that had been featured.³⁴ But even letters whose authors did not include critical comments about individual programs were viewed as a valuable source of information about one question in particular: how many people were watching particular shows. For this reason, letters were carefully counted to determine which programs and content desks were receiving the most mail. The absence of significant viewer response in the form of letters was viewed as a serious problem for an individual program—if viewers had not been moved to write about anything, not even to get an address, then the program was not engaging the audience as it should be. Although it was not explicitly mentioned as a motive, it seems likely that the widespread use of viewer write-in quizzes [*viktoriny*], a practice long in use by Soviet radio (and, notably, Western commercial broadcasters seeking to demonstrate audience size to potential advertisers) and employed by such unlikely content desks as news and propaganda, was designed as a primitive measure of audience size, as well as a method for engaging viewers actively with a program’s content.

Sociological surveys of the television audience

Despite the diverse uses the Bureau of Letters found for viewer letters, in the mid 1960s the NMO began to express dissatisfaction with letters and meetings as the sole source for information about the television audience.³⁵ Letters and meetings with viewers, a 1965 NMO report concluded, were all “mediated” [*posredнические*] rather than direct sources of information about the audience’s tastes and habits. “The general problem of these methods,” the report’s author wrote, “is that they are partial, not complete; they do not sufficiently reflect the opinion of the whole listening or viewing audience. They cannot tell broadcast staff about the size of their audience or how viewers and listeners would rate a given program.”³⁶ That kind of information could only be gathered via a method that was just beginning to gain prominence in other media (and official acceptance) in the mid-1960s: the sociological survey.³⁷

to the lives of workers, rather than artists, a message that Central Television’s leadership was promoting around the same time. GARF f. 6903 op. 10 d. 44 ll. 2-3.

³³ See for example RGANI f. 5 op. 58 d. 25 ll. 97-98. See also a 1962 letter from Central Television to the Central Committee, in response to letters from Party members the Central Committee had forwarded. GARF f. 6903 op. 1 d. 741 ll. 8-17.

³⁴ See for example GARF f. 6903 op. 10 dela 24 and 65 l. 38.

³⁵ We cannot assume that this dissatisfaction was universally shared within Central Television. In her interviews with prominent Soviet television journalists and commentators in the mid 1980s, Ellen Mickiewicz noted that many felt that analysis of viewer letters was not only adequate, but superior to sociological surveys. Mickiewicz, *Split Signals: Television and Politics in the Soviet Union* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 81-82.

³⁶ “Itogovaia spravka o rezul’tatakh sotsiologicheskogo issledovaniia populiarnosti radio i televizionnykh programm, provedennego na predpriatiakh g. Moskvy” GARF f. 6903 op. 3 d. 277 l. 17.

³⁷ This chapter focuses on audience research conducted by Central Television directly; however, Central Television staff also had access to published results of media audience surveys conducted by sociologists and other media organizations, which were quite extensive, and sometimes of higher quality than those

Central Television had conducted audience surveys on a very small scale, as part of face-to-face meetings with audience members, since the immediate post-war period.³⁸ The use of written surveys [*anketnye oprosy*] began to increase substantially during the early 1960s, however, and they began to focus on areas of particular interest to broadcasters, such as viewers' opinions on shows during times of day or week for which schedule changes were being considered.³⁹ The use of surveys expanded exponentially, however, beginning in 1965, when Soviet sociology dramatically raised its public profile.⁴⁰ In 1965, NMO surveys began to be referred to as "sociological research" [*sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia*], rather than simply "written surveys" [*anketnye oprosy*]. They also began to be conducted separately from meetings with viewers, and administered in person by small teams of NMO staff or volunteer interviewers, or by telephone.⁴¹ Sample sizes also began to increase—one 1967 survey covered almost 3500 viewers in 20 cities and towns around the USSR that received Central Television—and NMO researchers began to use some more sophisticated sociological sampling methods.⁴²

The surveys conducted by the NMO from 1965-1967 suggest interests among Soviet broadcasters that were very similar to the information sought by U.S. broadcasters via the Nielsen ratings system. NMO surveys, particularly those conducted between 1965 and 1967, sought to establish who was watching what and when. At what times of the day and week was the largest viewing audience gathered? Which shows attracted which segments of the population (divided most often by the key Soviet identifier, profession, but also by age, gender, educational level, and rural or urban place of residence)?⁴³ These interests were spurred by the fact that in 1965-67 the NMO and Central Television's leadership were working to develop a new broadcast schedule that would take into account the daily habits of the large new audience that Ostankino and satellite

conducted by Central Television. For a detailed discussion of Soviet media audience research, see Ellen Mickiewicz, *Media and the Russian Public* (New York: Praeger, 1981), 1-17.

³⁸ Surveys were used by the NMO almost immediately after its founding, as early as 1945. See "Predislovie," GARF f. 6903 op. 3. Survey research was also widely used in the Soviet Union during the 1920s, but the denunciation of sociology as a bourgeois pseudoscience under Stalin during the 1930s and 40s brought sociological research to a halt. For more on the history of Soviet sociology see Vladimir Shlapentokh, *The Politics of Sociology in the Soviet Union*, Delphic monograph series (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1987), 13-15.

³⁹ See for example GARF f. 6903 op. 3 dela 184, 211, 249. Dealing with leisure time budgets, these surveys were typical of the kind of Soviet sociological research conducted in the early 1960s, which were largely limited to questions that did not directly concern public opinion about state institutions or initiatives.

⁴⁰ 1965 is generally considered the beginning of the "golden age" of Soviet sociology. That year saw the publication of the first major sociological studies, the first important training and methodological conference in Leningrad (as well as many smaller seminars) and the commissioning of a countrywide survey of the newspaper *Izvestia*'s readership. Shlapentokh, 33-34.

⁴¹ See for example GARF f. 6903 op. 3 dela 281, 324, 411, 412.

⁴² Although reports on methods used to sample and poll the population are not always recorded along with results in Gosteleradio's archive, one survey mentioned the use of quota sampling, a non-randomized sample selection strategy that collects demographic information about subjects to construct a sample based on predetermined criteria. GARF f. 6903 op. 3 dela 407, 408. For more on Soviet survey methods and the weaknesses of quota sampling vs randomized samples, see Mickiewicz, *Media and the Russian Public*, 14-15

⁴³ Several surveys focused explicitly on one sector of the audience, such as "youth" or "rural residents." GARF f. 6903 op. 3 dela 328, 329.

broadcasting would bring into Central Television's range. The formulation of a new television schedule was also an opportunity to solve—before it began to affect a much broader audience—the nearly decade-old problem of multi-channel broadcasting in a system where the different channels were intended to complement, not compete with, one another.⁴⁴

Even though NMO staff asked many of the same questions and explicitly sought to borrow the methods of American media audience research, they saw themselves as defining a uniquely socialist form of television programming, motivated by a different relationship between broadcasters and their audience than that of the capitalist West. “We are often told to study their [American] sociological research methods for learning about the television and radio audience,” an NMO report from 1965 commented, “but we forget about the means and goals for this research, and their goals are completely unacceptable [*nepriemlimy*] to us.”⁴⁵ Defining the difference between Soviet audience study practices and American or capitalist ones became a critically important feature of discussions of how the new sociological research would be put to use in Central Television’s programming and scheduling decisions.

Defining socialist audience research

The first distinction Central Television and NMO staff drew was in the purpose of socialist broadcasting, and its relationship to audience tastes. This was a distinction that underlay the official Soviet understanding of the goals of state action, and of Soviet superiority in the Cold War competition with the West. As Nikolai Mesiatsev, the Chairman of *Gosteleradio* from 1964 to 1970 put it in a 1966 speech to the Committee’s Party members, television sets were not only a consumer good essential to the leisure-oriented culture of a wealthy society. “It seems clear,” he observed, “that the criteria for determining the wealth of a particular society should include not just material goods per ‘soul’ of the population, but, if we can put it this way, the production of that soul itself. The well-rounded development of the individual is the factor defining the economic and cultural, material and spiritual progress of society.”⁴⁶

In practice, of course, producing well-rounded viewers required at least engaging, if not entertaining, them. NMO surveys in 1965 and 1966 had already begun to provide important information about what viewers were really watching; in 1967, the NMO began to address the question of viewer tastes even more directly, asking viewers to rate how “satisfied” they were with the programs produced by particular content desks.⁴⁷ However, the information these studies provided, one NMO report stressed, “in no way means that broadcasting should only chase after majority tastes, sink to their level...the way American television does. That would be to risk turning broadcasting into ‘tailism,’ making it lose its progressive meaning.” Instead, the report continued,

⁴⁴ Since the introduction of the second Moscow channel in 1959, Central Television had received frequent complaints from viewers about the relationship between the programs on each channel. See for example GARF f. 6903 op. 10 d. 66 ll. 147, 165.

⁴⁵ GARF f. 6903 op. 3 d. 277, l. 12.

⁴⁶ RGASPI-m f. 43 op. 1 d. 36 l. 750.

⁴⁷ For surveys focusing on “stepen’ udovletvorennosti telezritelei programmami televidenii” see GARF f. 6903 op. 3 d. 410; Pavel Gurevitch, “Zhazhda informatsii,” *Zhurnalist* No. 8 (August, 1968): 61-62.

We're not talking about following the latest trend or serving those [lowest] tastes. We're talking about making programs that, while serving progressive goals, interest many people, programs that the majority of people enjoy, that would reach them in meaningful ways [*dokhodila do ego soznaniiia*], and which are not turned off because of their boring presentation, insufficiently interesting content, or lack of clarity.⁴⁸

Thus, despite their sense that Soviet television's progressive intentions distinguished it from its American counterparts, NMO officials recognized that television's (and radio's) form demanded this kind of compromise with viewers' tastes, since viewers could simply turn off programs that they found unappealing. "Everyone knows about the noble goals of Soviet radio and television," the 1965 report observed, "but good intentions cannot always be realized unless we make programs with sufficient tact and mastery." This need for compromise had not been properly recognized in the past, the 1965 NMO report argued.

For a long time a "theory of imposition" [*teoriia naviazyvaniia*] held sway, and the ability to impose your will was seen as the best quality of a leader. The logic went as follows: if a person does not understand that something is being done in his best interest there's no reason to wait until he reaches that understanding...later he'll get it and thank us for it. This is an extremely primitive and false view...with one quick gesture the TV viewer and radio listener can get out from "under the influence" of a program that's boring him. That's the unique quality of radio and television, which differentiates it from lectures, films, or plays. There someone can be snoring, but nonetheless stay in the hall or theater pretending that he's paying attention. But with television or radio...he can just turn off the set and go play dominos...⁴⁹

Because of radio and television's setting in the home, in other words, realizing the "progressive goals" of Soviet broadcasting seemed to require both concessions to audience tastes and a great deal of skill on the part of television's writers, directors, and editors, on whose "mastery and tact" the creation of shows that were enlightening, but not boring, depended.

A second distinction between Soviet and American broadcasters' use of audience research concerned the target audience for different kinds of programs. For broadcasters in America and other capitalist countries, the NMO observed, the objective was to have the largest percentage of the total audience tuned in, and to keep them viewing as long as possible. Their studies, the 1965 NMO report declared, aimed to "discover the most fashionable, stupefying programs, in order to use them as a model and glue as many people as possible to their televisions and radios, regardless of their interests or needs." Soviet broadcasters, by contrast, had objectives that "coincide with the interests of viewers and listeners...That's why," the report continued, "our programs are not addressed to everyone, but to certain groups of people, with consideration to their activities, age, gender, education, even place of residence." Not every show would

⁴⁸ GARF f. 6903 op. 3 d. 277 l. 17

⁴⁹ Ibid., l. 18.

appeal to every person, and that was the point: TV viewing would not turn Soviet citizens into zombies. After a program that interested them they would turn off the set and go pursue some other valuable activity. Only events of the “greatest social significance, like the opening of the 22nd Party Congress,” should aim to reach the entire Soviet audience, otherwise, the question was which sub-audience a program should target. “That is the principal difference between our country’s approach to the study of the audience and that of capitalist countries,” the 1965 NMO report concluded.⁵⁰

This view of Central Television’s programming gained a foothold among some television executives. In 1967, Anatolii Bogomolov, the head of the Central Television programming desk, which was responsible for setting the schedule, published an article in *Zhurnalist* entitled “Watch Less Television,” in which he responded to press criticism of the boringness of Central Television’s content. Critics assumed, he argued, that every minute of the television schedule should interest every viewer. This was an impossible and undesirable goal, especially since Central Television’s broadcasts on two Moscow channels totaled 18 hours/day, and would soon, with the opening of Ostankino, increase to 50 hours per day, on four Moscow channels. Instead, Soviet television programmers sought to “teach the viewer to choose...teach him to watch as little as possible,” because

There’s such a thing as too much entertainment [*ob’estsia zrelishchem*]. The misuse of television is dangerous, for both viewers and television itself. [After hours of watching] viewers...can no longer make sense of what they’re seeing and hearing. We get letters surprisingly similar to those of the critics: “yesterday I watched all evening and nothing good was on.” It’s hard not to answer, “do not spend the whole evening in front of the TV! Watch one or two programs, a broadcast of “Television news” and then go read or take a walk.⁵¹

Bogomolov’s vision of viewer behavior was modeled on print journals and smaller circulation newspapers, which targeted particular audiences, from professionals in a given field, to members of particular social categories (women, collective farmers, workers), to all those interested in literature, for example. This view was enduring; it was still widespread enough in 1970 to be mocked in a cartoon in the satirical journal *Krokodil*. The cartoon depicts a stern male newsreader leaning out of the screen to scold a viewer: “What are you doing lazing around the house? Go take a walk or something!” Still, Bogomolov’s ambivalence about television’s power to command audience attention is striking for a medium that could be compared to the central Communist Party newspaper, *Pravda*, given its centralized production and mass “circulation.”⁵²

In order to direct viewers’ habits to this extent, of course, it was also necessary to coordinate the content of Moscow’s two broadcast channels, both with one another and with the radio schedule. By moving among channels and media, after all, Soviet viewers might find a way to consume too much entertainment. In December 1965, the NMO

⁵⁰ Ibid., 1. 12.

⁵¹ Anatolii Bogomolov, “Pomen’she smotrite televizor,” *Zhurnalist* No. 6 (June 1967), 39-41.

⁵² Kristin Roth-Ey has attributed this discomfort with “excessive” viewing to the poor fit between television’s form and Soviet cultural values, particularly during the Thaw, which sought to encourage popular participation and activism, and found television’s power to pacify its audience disturbing, much like Western critics of the medium. Roth-Ey, “Finding a Home for Soviet Television.”

organized a conference on the question of programming and coordination between channels in advance of the opening of Ostankino, which would increase the number of channels available in Moscow to four and, outside Moscow, create a competitive situation between local stations and the newly national Central Television Channel 1. The conference brought together a diverse group of participants: representatives of the Aesthetics section of the Ministry of Culture's Institute of History of the Arts, the Moscow State University Department of Radio and Television, and the Sociological Research Laboratory of Leningrad State University were all invited. There were also powerful listeners in the room, representatives of the Central Committee's Higher Party School, of the Academy of Sciences' Institute of Philosophy and Academy of Social Sciences (all central institutions for the formation of Soviet ideology), as well as members of the Writers', Cinematographers' and Journalists' Unions and students from Moscow State University and the All-Union State Institute of Cinematography. The conference was timed to coincide with a quarterly meeting of local TV staff in charge of scheduling [*programmnye redaktry*], so local schedulers from 40 cities were also present.⁵³

The conference report stressed the unique task facing Soviet television as it sought to create a single national schedule for Central Television Channel 1: not only did the new national channel need to accommodate the Soviet Union's immense size and number of time zones, but, unlike television in capitalist countries, the new channel and its schedule would not be based on the principle of competition, and had to be created as part of a congruous system of broadcasting, in which each locality took into account the multiple channels available to its audience as it created schedules. "As soon as a second channel appears alongside an existing one, a "competitive" situation arises," the conference report observed. This situation demanded the coordination of different channel schedules, the creation, for each channel, of a distinct "profile" [*litso*]. The question for television programmers, the report continued, was "should the viewer have the chance, every day, to make a free choice between channels, or should the viewing audience be more or less proportionally divided between separate channels" targeting their particular social or interest groups?⁵⁴

The conference discussions had generated an answer to this question: viewers should indeed have a choice, but with fairly strict terms that would prevent both excessive viewing and unwanted "competition" between different channels and individual programs. Scheduling should be based on the division of programs into two categories: those for "a mass audience, i.e. the whole audience" and those "for a differentiated audience, for particular groups among the audience, differing from one another by age, gender, education, profession, interests and so forth." Conference participants proposed that programs aimed at a mass audience, but of different genres (movies and sports, for example) should be scheduled to coincide with one another. When programs aimed at specific audiences (like agricultural workers) were on one channel, the other channel should also show a narrowly targeted program, but for a

⁵³ "Spravka po itogam teoreticheskoi konferentsii "Printsipy mnogoprogrammnogo televideniya", in "materialy k protokoly #2 zased Goskomiteta ot 21 ianvaria 1966 g." GARF f. 6903 op. 1 d. 886 ll. 196, 213.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, l. 206. Of course, viewers would retain a choice among channels because of television's consumption in the home, regardless of Central Television's efforts to direct their selections.

different subgroup of the audience. Most important of all, they noted, was to “carefully ensure that a political program did not share a time slot with a movie or entertaining variety show” on the other channel.⁵⁵

The scheduling conference’s proposed division of all shows into two categories, those aimed at the whole audience and those targeting particular sub groups, reveals that there was something inherently problematic about the idea that socialist television would aim to moderate the television audience’s viewing. While Bogomolov insisted that only the most significant political programs, like Party Congresses, should engage the entire audience, other Central Television staff were defining the category of “mass” programs as meaning entertainment programs—movies and variety shows. In order to moderate viewing and ensure that viewers did not have the opportunity to express their preference for entertaining content over important political messages, schedules needed to be carefully coordinated.

The choice to define “mass” programming as entertainment programming reflected Central Television’s rapidly increasing knowledge about the audience’s actual viewing habits: surveys about what audience members watched consistently demonstrated that movies and popular music variety shows attracted by far the largest audiences. This was not news to Central Television staff—it was a fact of life familiar from their own social networks and from letters and face-to-face meetings with viewers, in which audience members frequently expressed the sense that television’s purpose was the provision of entertainment, particularly recent movies and popular music.⁵⁶ This opinion was also resoundingly expressed in surveys that focused on another competitive problem television introduced: competition with other Soviet media. Over and over in the mid-1960s, Soviet viewers reported preferring to listen to news and classical music genres on the radio, seeing television’s special function as a medium for movies, sports, and popular music (for which the hairstyles, clothing, and dance moves of the performers were as important as the music itself).⁵⁷

The confrontation with evidence from sociological audience surveys had a profound impact on the creation of Central Television’s Channel 1 schedule. It revealed the partial contradiction between the two major characteristics of “socialist” television that Central Television’s programming desk and the NMO sought to publicize. Soviet television could not easily “produce [viewers’] souls,” raising them up with enlightening programs, if it was also committed to limiting their viewing. After all, viewers could and did choose to limit their viewing by simply switching off the set. This problem could not be solved by ensuring that there was no entertaining alternative on another channel. Viewers might indeed spend their leisure time with other pursuits, but that might not mean reading the paper or taking a walk—they could also play dominos.⁵⁸ The idea that

⁵⁵ Ibid., 1. 207.

⁵⁶ For examples see GARF f. 6903 op. 10 dela 58 l. 29.

⁵⁷ See for example GARF f. 6903 op. 3 d. 211 l. 3.

⁵⁸ Television’s ability to replace undesirable forms of leisure, such as drinking, fighting, and gambling, was explicitly acknowledged, and was one important motive behind the very extensive broadcast of popular sporting events: the broadcast of soccer and hockey matches was occasionally mentioned in Central Television’s reports on its activities in support of “anti-alcohol propaganda.” See for example “Stenogramma sobraniiia partiinogo aktiva “O sostianii raboty po vypolneniiu Postanovlenii TsK KPSS o merakh po usilenuu bor’by protiv p’ianstva i alkogolizma, vytetkaiushchikh iz reshenii KPK pri TsK KPSS

viewers might fall asleep in front of the screen was reflected in a 1965 cartoon in the satirical magazine *Krokodil*. The caption reads “TV viewer-inventor”—a reference to state-sponsored workplace innovation contests. Here, the viewer has fitted his television with an alarm clock, and has fallen asleep while an old man on screen reads from a script, the kind of illustration-free lecture about which viewers frequently complained.

Despite their frequent professions of discomfort with excessive viewing, it made little sense to invest in television’s infrastructure as extensively as the Party was doing in the mid-1960s without being willing to use television as aggressively as possible to influence the audience. Doing so would require striking a balance between, or finding ways to combine, the conflicting imperatives to engage audiences by meeting their demands for entertainment (thus keeping them tuned in) and to ensure that television was influencing them in the ways desired by the state. Over the course of 1965-1968, the NMO’s sociological surveys began to ask and find out more about viewer habits and tastes. In response to these findings, Central Television formulated a number of practical responses to this problem, responses that were far more complex than their public statements about the nature and goals of “socialist” audience research.

Before turning to the NMO’s findings and Central Television’s responses, however, we should consider what it was that viewers could respond to in the mid-1960s. In 1957, Central Television had four program desks [*glavnye redaktsii*]: Social-political [*obshchestvenno-politicheskii*], which included everything from propaganda of Marxism-Leninism to sports to educational programming, Artistic [*khudozhestvennye*], Children’s and Youth programs [*dlya detei i molodezhi*], and film programs [*kinoprogramm*]. By 1965, there were eight content desks: for social-political programs, news programs, literature and drama, musical programs, film programs, programs for children and youth, and educational [*uchebnye*] programs, as well as programs specifically for Moscow and its region and a desk devoted to the exchange of television programs domestically and internationally.⁵⁹ As these changes suggest, artistic programming continued to expand (in the form of Central Television-produced programs about the arts and featuring artists) and formed a substantial part of the schedule. But the expansion of non-artistic programming produced by Central Television—direct propaganda and news in particular—was even more marked. A schedule from 1965 suggest the expansion, both of total programming and of non-artistic programs, since the 1959 schedule given at the beginning of this chapter:

Thursday, January 14th, 1965

First Channel:

5:00 pm	For schoolchildren “School of beginning athletes”
5:30	For schoolchildren “Lenin listens to music”
6:00	“Television news”
6:10	On the 50 th anniversary of the first Russian revolution. “The Party’s Flag.” Film essay

ot 20 aprelia 1977 goda,”” from July 13, 1977, Tsentral’nyi Arkhiv Obshchestvenno-politicheskoi Istorii Moskvy (TsAOPIM) f. 2930 op. 3 d. 230 l. 18-19.

⁵⁹ TsAOPIM, f. 2930 op. 1 “*Predislovie*.”

6:30	S. Lvov's "Seventh move" [<i>Sed'moi khod</i>] Television play premier
8:00	"In the stadiums and playing fields" [a sports news program]
9:00	"From melody to melody" Film-concert from the Kiev television studio
9:30	"News relay" [a weekly news commentary program led by Iurii Fokin]

Second Channel: [available only in Moscow and its environs]

6:30 pm	"In the stadiums and playing fields"
8:00	"Good night little ones!"
8:10	"Moscow news"
8:40	"Your heroes, Komsomol!" "Fighter on the Red Front Olga Benario"
9:40	"How to tune in to the third television channel"
10:00	Concert by Armenian masters of the arts

As this schedule suggests, many genres of television programming were increasing in quantity, including made-for-television plays and films (the first television serial film on Central Television, "We Draw the Fire onto Ourselves," was broadcast in 1965), children's shows, and sports programming.⁶⁰ Still, the direct propaganda television films, as well as the news commentary show *News Relay*, which often lasted an hour and a half or more, reflect a larger trend. What did Central Television learn about its audience's responses to schedules like these?

Findings

The problem of boredom

The most basic finding of the audience surveys the NMO conducted during the second half of the 1960s was the preference for entertaining content and the corresponding belief that television ought to complement, rather than compete with, radio and newspapers by providing movies, plays, game shows, and popular music.⁶¹ In a 1963 survey of Moscow employees of the Ministry of Trade, one respondent complained that television "often carries speeches and lectures on different questions, and often these speeches take up a lot of time. Would it not be better to put all that on the radio and use the television schedule entirely for its primary purpose, that is, showing movies, concerts, plays, and other forms of art?"⁶² Viewers writing comments on their surveys complained that television's entertainment offerings were often inferior to those of newspapers and radio, and that television was taking them away from those media. Rural viewers, a new and important audience for television, were particularly vocal in their calls for entertaining content. Over and over, they argued that, unlike their urban peers, they had few alternatives to the mass media for their leisure time. A collective farmer from Riazan *oblast'* reversed Bogomolov's accusation that viewers were watching uncritically by charging that viewers kept watching in the vain hope that something good might be on

⁶⁰ For more on Soviet serial films, see Elena Prokhorova, "Fragmented Mythologies: Soviet TV Miniseries of the 1970s," (Ph.D. dissertation. University of Pittsburgh, 2003).

⁶¹ Popularity was not just a matter of genre, of course—much viewer complaint was also directed toward popular programs, such as the variety "café" program "Little blue flame", which had, in the viewer's opinion, failed to satisfy.

⁶² GARF f. 6903 op. 3 d. 211 l. 3.

next. “We sit in the evenings by the television and wait,” she wrote, “What if all of a sudden they show something good? Because of this anticipation, we do not even listen to the radio in the evening anymore.” “Newspapers and journals print interesting articles and stories about heroism, the exposure of spies and so forth,” added a milkmaid from the same farm, “but television does not want to “tempt” [“zavlekat”] us. These are the kinds of programs that rural viewers want to see.”⁶³

These findings were confirmed in sociological studies being conducted for other media audiences. In 1967 the newspaper *Izvestiia* conducted a nationwide survey of its readership, which found that the four categories of article relating most directly to Soviet ideology and domestic news were the ones that respondents reported reading least often. Other politically important parts of the paper, such as foreign news, were read regularly by a large percentage of viewers, however. According to an article in the journal *Zhurnalist*, the *Izvestiia* sample was based on the responses of 26,000 readers out of 7 million who received the survey; given the level of political engagement required to respond to the survey at all, it seems likely that mass opinion was even less favorable toward domestic news and direct propaganda.⁶⁴

Beginning in 1967, the NMO began to ask viewers even more directly what they were and were not watching, and its reports did not shrink from juxtaposing the popularity of directly political programs with entertaining ones. This was a substantial departure from what had been permissible earlier. A 1965 survey of the “popularity” of television and radio programs, for example, had been careful to divide shows into categories so that popularity of a given news or propaganda program was measured only relative to other shows in the same category.⁶⁵ Similarly, NMO surveys in 1965-66 often focused on just one genre of program—artistic programs, for example, or those for young audiences—in order to prevent awkward comparisons between political and entertainment genres.⁶⁶ Beginning in 1967, such preventive measures were not always taken. One survey defined its goal as “getting data characterizing TV viewers’ relationship to the major programs on Central Television.” Viewers were asked two main questions: which programs should stay in the current Central Television schedule and which should go? Twelve additional questions were intended “to uncover in more detail which aspects of these programs viewers like and which they do not like.” The survey also listed 35 Central Television programs by name and asked viewers to give their opinions on them.⁶⁷

In 1967 the NMO also began to administer surveys that asked audience members to

⁶³ “Itogovaia spravka o rezul’tatakh anketnogo oprosa radioslushatelei i telezritelei o radio i teleperedachakh dlia sel’skikh zhitelei,” 1965, GARF f. 6903 op. 3 d. 280 l. 20.

⁶⁴ The four rubrics that were least often reported “read regularly” were “Pereanovaia” [leading people and organizations/best practices], “Ekonomika”, “Propagandistskie stat’i” [propagandistic articles], and “Rabota sovetov” [The work of the Soviets]. Vasili Davydchenkov and Vladimir Shlapentokh, “‘Izvestiia’ izuchaiut chitatelia,” *Zhurnalist*, No. 2 (February, 1968):23-25.

⁶⁵ “Itogovaia spravka o rezul’tatakh sotsiologicheskogo issledovaniia popularnosti radio i televizionnykh programm, provedennego na predpriatiiaakh g. Moskvy,” GARF f. 6903 op. 3, d. 277, l. 37.

⁶⁶ See for example “Itogovaia spravka o rezul’tatakh anketnykh oprosov radioslushatelei i telezritelei o khudozhestvennykh peredachakh radio i televideniiia,” GARF f. 6903 op. 3 d. 281; “Itogovaia spravka o rezul’tatakh anketnogo oprosa telezritelei o molodezhnykh programmakh i statisticheskie tablitsy k nim,” GARF f. 6903 op. 3 d. 329.

⁶⁷ “Itogovaia spravka o rezul’tatakh anketnom oprosa “Zriteli o programmakh i peredachakh Tsentral’nogo televideniiia” za fevral’-mai 1967 g. i dokumenty k nei,” GARF f. 6903 op. 3 d. 407 ll. 1-2.

simply report what they had watched, from all categories, over the course of the previous week. The result, in at least one survey, was a ranked list not unlike those provided by the American ratings system, with the most-watched programs on top. That survey, conducted among employees at seven Moscow factories and other institutions for the period July 30th-August 5th, 1967, found that the top four programs viewed by the respondents were soccer, boxing, the variety show *Little Flame*, and a Soviet Navy parade. After the parade, the next news or social-political program, the popular weekly *News Relay* (which contained a good deal of information on foreign affairs and cultural life) was seventh, followed by the daily *Television News* at a distant fourteenth. Other than a youth journal, called *Youth on the Air* [*V efte molodost'*], which featured contests and musical performances, no propagandistic programs had been mentioned often enough to make the list.⁶⁸

The 1967 surveys broke new ground in a second way: they began to explore why viewers avoided news and propagandistic programs, and what might be done to increase the audience for such programs. A substantial group of viewers described these programs as boring or irrelevant to their lives. Most often, this problematic fact was explained with reference to the rapid cultural advancement of the Soviet audience—their intellectual demands were outpacing the qualifications of Central Television's staff. The latter needed to adapt programs to meet viewer demands, particularly for visual content, timely news reports, and lively presentation devoid of formulaic language.⁶⁹

A second response was to accept that certain programs (those focusing on narrow areas of scientific and economic life) could appeal only to a limited audience. As early as the late 1950s television enthusiasts had called for creating content that had an “exact address”—a particular viewer—in mind. They had often meant this rather abstractly, however, as a kind of mental practice for television professionals like Valentina Leont'eva. Ideally, they were to imagine an educated, curious, enthusiastic Soviet citizen as their audience, and shape their on-screen manner to facilitate connection with such people, who might be found in many milieus. With the expansion of sociological surveys this “exact address” came to refer primarily to concrete subgroups of the population, defined by categories like gender, education, and profession. As one 1965 survey report observed, one major reason why certain kinds of propagandistic and educational programs were failing to interest viewers was that they failed to properly understand the narrowness of their audience. If they were promoting the latest advances in chemical engineering, for example, they should not pitch their content toward a high-school educated audience, who were not likely to be interested. If they did, they would also alienate the specialists that such programs most needed to reach.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ “Itogovaia spravka o rezul'tatakh ezhednevnogo oprosa radioslushatelei i telezritelei g. Moskvy o radio- i teleperedachakh, provedennogo s 30 iiulia po 5 avgusta 1967 g. i dokumenty k nei,” GARF f. 6903 op. 3 d. 408 l. 4.

⁶⁹ This claim was articulated by the head of the methodological section of Estonian Television, Rut Karemaie in a 1967 article. Karemaie, “...Kak tiazhelye pushki v boiu!” *Sovetskoe radio i televidenie* No. 7 (July, 1967):30-33. This framework for understanding viewer boredom continued to be used throughout the 1970s, since it usefully shifted the problem from the viewers or important ideological practices and documents to the Central Television staff.

⁷⁰ GARF f. 6903 op. 3 d. 277 l. 37. One show that exemplified this problem was “Ekran bol’shoi khimii” or “Industrial chemistry hour” [literally “Big chemistry on screen”], a show created as part of Khrushchev’s

In the early 1960s, viewer complaints about boringness and lack of quality entertainments on television were often sidelined by simply excluding those viewers who expressed dissatisfaction from the legitimate Soviet television audience. As one television staffer who worked in the content desk responsible for films and film-related programs put it in a January, 1961 meeting of Central Television's Party committee,

There are letters and then there are letters...I do not understand why we even need to discuss letters from undiscerning [*netrebovatel'nye*] viewers here. Of course we get letters requesting that we show intellectually and artistically weak films. What, are we going to treat those letters as examples of the average viewer's opinion? What's the point of that?"⁷¹

As television's audience expanded, however, this viewpoint became less sustainable. Once again, if television hoped to influence a mass, less-educated audience, as the Central Committee had committed television to do in the 1960 decree on "The Future Development of Television," it would need to ensure that as large an audience as possible was actually watching.⁷²

The 1967 surveys uncovered another reason why attracting and retaining a mass audience was critical: the Soviet audience was listening to foreign radio broadcasts and Soviet TV and radio news were failing to compete. One survey of the viewing and listening habits of employees at seven Moscow institutions, including the Red October chocolate factory, an electrical lighting factory, a computing center of the Central Statistical Directorate, and the Ministry of Trade, revealed that 54% of those surveyed listened to foreign radio broadcasts. Many of them, the NMO's audience research group reported, "explained that they listened to foreign stations because of the insufficient timeliness and concreteness of our [Soviet] news." NMO interviewers drew their respondents out on this theme. "It's shameful," one viewer stated, "that our radio and television are not as timely as their foreign counterparts. Radio and television should broadcast and explain more facts, not only important ones, but also minor but characteristic ones." "Less mechanical recitation of facts [*nachetnichestvo*] and boring theoretical explanations," another viewer suggested. "Inform us in a timely manner about political events, and do not let the bourgeois radio stations' news go without proper explanation."⁷³

The fact that the NMO focused directly on these questions (and was allowed to ask them in the first place) indicates the Central Committee's growing concern about foreign radio's influence on Soviet audiences. The desire to maximize viewership and listenership for Soviet news, and minimize unflattering comparisons with foreign news sources, had a profound impact on the Central Television schedule created for the opening of Ostankino in 1967-68 (as well as on the form and content of Central

push for the introduction of modern industrial chemistry in the Soviet Union, including the production of fertilizers and plastics.

⁷¹ "Vystupleniia kommunistov na ob"edinennom partiinom sobranii Gl. red. Tsent. telev. Goskomiteta po radiov i telev. pri SM SSSR 25 Jan 1962," TsAOPIM, f. 2930, op. 1, d. 31, l. 5.

⁷² See Chapter 1 of this dissertation. The text of the decree is available in *KPSS o sredstvakh massovoi informatsii i propagandy*, second supplemented edition (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1987), 539-545.

⁷³ GARF f. 6903 op. 3 d. 408 l. 6.

Television news programs, the subject of the next chapter). In effect, the attempt to use Central Television more directly to influence viewers, making it a more effective vehicle for state messages, meant reshaping the schedule to suit viewers' habits and meet their demands for popular content during hours when they were watching.

The problem of creating an all-Union schedule

This was not easy to do. The problem of creating a daily schedule that could suit the entire population was familiar from the experience of radio. Simply put, different parts of the population had different scheduling needs and demands, some of which were not reconcilable. A State Radio and Television Committee meeting in 1957 fixed on just one aspect of the problem: school children studying in the second shift (a widespread practice in Soviet schools) did their homework in the mornings, during the same time in which factory workers on the first shift took their lunch breaks.⁷⁴ Which was worse—distracting school children from their homework or denying workers entertaining content during their leisure time?

This and countless other scheduling dilemmas were the subject of a significant amount of viewer mail. Despite this, in June 1963 Central Television solicited yet more viewer feedback by publishing a draft schedule and requesting viewer responses by mail. They received over 700 letters, whose complaints ranged from the time slots of favorite programs to the overall timing of the viewing day. Collective farmers wanted evening programs to begin later during the growing season, to reflect their late return from the fields; parents wanted them to end earlier, since in their one-room communal apartments they had to turn off the set along with the lights when the children went to bed. There were also numerous complaints about the division of programs between the first and second Moscow channels, since only the former reached sets outside the immediate Moscow area. Viewers beyond its reach complained bitterly about what they saw as the more appealing offerings of the second channel, including more entertainment content and shows on topics like health and home economics, which were of personal interest to many viewers. Conflicting viewer schedules would only become a more serious concern with the expansion of broadcasting across the Soviet Union's 11 time zones.⁷⁵

The expansion of sociological surveys beginning in the mid 1960s provided statistical evidence for another problem that letters had described anecdotally: it was very difficult to ensure that programs aimed at a particular demographic subgroup, as was the declared objective of Soviet scheduling, actually reached their target. Often it was not the targeted group that wrote in to thank Central Television for a given show. Likewise, the percent of viewers watching a given show often exceeded the size of the target audience. For example, several "youth" programs, like the popular game show "Club of

⁷⁴ GARF f. 6903 op. 1 d. 522 l. 35.

⁷⁵ Indeed, in the years between the beginning of satellite broadcasting in November, 1967 and the introduction in 1980 of a broadcasting block for every two time zones (with the exception of the Far Eastern broadcast, which served three time zones), Central Television's programming desk received hundreds of letters a month complaining about the timing of programs from nearly every corner of the country. For the 1980 change to the satellite-rebroadcasting system, see "O perevode pervoi programmy tsentral'nogo vnutrisoiuznogo radioveshchaniia na 5-ti zonal'noe veshchaniie." GARF f. 6903 op. 32 d. 1242 l. 103. For viewer complaints about the timing of Central Television's broadcasts in their region, see GARF f. 6903 op. 36 d. 42 l. 117-119 and d. 25 l. 97. For responses to a 1975 attempt to improve the organization of broadcasts to other time zones, see GARF f. 6903 op. 32 d. 496 l. 40.

the Merry and Resourceful [*Klub Veselykh i Nakhodchivkh*],” were watched by the entire population, including the elderly. Surveys conducted among particular target audiences often revealed preferences that diverged from those imagined or hoped for by Central Television and its Party supervisors. Programs aimed at rural viewers, for example, received a great deal of mail from urbanites nostalgic for an imagined countryside.⁷⁶

Nonetheless, sociological surveys provided a new perspective on these otherwise insoluble problems, by providing data on the sheer number of eyes watching television at particular times of day or week. These studies revealed, unsurprisingly, that Soviet television had a weekday evening equivalent of the American networks’ “prime time”, which television staff referred to as “the most-watched time” [*samoe smotrovoe vremia*]. As one 1967 survey revealed, on weekdays viewing among the Moscow audience jumped from about 13% of the audience at 5 pm, to 27% at 6 pm, to 52% at 7 pm (a whopping 66% in the provincial cities surveyed), to a peak of 62% (76% in the provinces) at 9 pm, then declining substantially beginning at 11pm. There were also revelations about weekend viewing audiences, most importantly that they were sizable. On Saturdays, the increase in viewing began an hour earlier, at 5 pm, and lasted until 11. On Sundays, daytime viewing was far greater than on Saturdays or weekdays, but evening viewing was also high, peaking at 8 or 9 pm.⁷⁷

In a 1968 speech at a conference devoted to the improvement of television scheduling, the Chairman of the State Television and Radio Committee, Nikolai Mesiatsev, described the importance of these kinds of survey data for the television schedule.

Programming is impossible without taking into account the many kinds of sociological data that in large part determine television’s effectiveness...One of the goals of television scheduling is to bring a given program to the group of viewers for which it is intended. Sometimes that group is 5 percent of the population, sometimes all 100 percent. But however small or big this audience is, television can only hope to gain the attention of the great mass of viewers during their leisure time.⁷⁸

Mesiatsev’s speech continued to support the notion that Soviet television should be aimed at different subgroups of the population, rather than seeking to attract an undifferentiated mass audience all the time. Yet his comments left open the possibility that during times when the “great mass” of the television audience was home, at rest, and watching, perhaps the only programs that ought to be featured were those that aimed at 100% of the audience, that is, programs of unusual political importance to the whole population, and entertaining content like movies, plays, and sports matches. This would solve the problem of the diversity of audience schedules (insofar as it was solvable at all, given that the movie could not begin at the perfect time for everyone), and the problem of audience boredom, all at once.

⁷⁶ GARF f. 6903 op. 36 d. 41 l. 9-10. In this 1975 letter report the authors note that Central Television received letters from city folk asking for help moving to the village “every month.”

⁷⁷ GARF f. 6903 op. 3 d. 412 ll. 1-5.

⁷⁸ RGASPI-m f. 43 op. 1 d. 40 ll. 42-43.

The 1969-70 Television Schedule

Prime time

To a striking extent, this was the solution reached by Central Television for its Channel 1 schedule, beginning in 1968-69. The weekday evening bloc of programming, which began at 5 pm and ended at 11pm on weeknights (at 12 am on Friday nights), contained only one half hour reserved for direct propagandistic, non-news programming—lectures on Marxism-Leninism and the like. In 1969-70 schedule, for example, that half hour was scheduled for 6:30-7 pm, and was devoted to a continuing education program for professional propagandists called “Leninist University of Millions” on Mondays and Tuesdays, and “Problems of Agriculture” on Wednesdays and Thursdays. From 7 pm, when most office workers were just arriving home, the 1969-70 evening schedule followed a clear organizational structure that would persist in roughly the same form until the end of the Soviet Union: a bloc of entertaining content, usually with mass appeal—a movie, a sports match, a concert, a television theater program—followed by *Programma “Vremia,”* the evening news program, at roughly 8:30, followed by another bloc of entertaining content, often original television programs about movies, sports, theater, or music. In its first year, *Vremia*’s timeslot, like that of *Latest news* before it, often varied to fit in the intermission between halves of a soccer game or an operetta. In 1969-1970, according to the highly regimented monthly schedule circulated by Central Television’s Center for Scientific Programming, *Vremia* would receive this treatment only on the fourth Monday of every month, when its regular time fell between halves of the opera featured on the program “Introduction to the Opera.”⁷⁹

The decision to orient the evening schedule toward the mass viewer, combining popular artistic content with a single, highest-priority news program, reflected personal inclination of the chairman of *Gosteleradio* in the late 1960s, Nikolai Mesiatsev, to accommodate mass tastes. Mesiatsev is fond of recounting how, in the early 1960s, he was asked by members of the Central Committee to cancel a popular morning radio program featuring light music and merry banter. To its misfortune, the show was on during the hours when Central Committee members were in their cars being driven to work, and they found it inappropriately frivolous. Rather than cancel the program, however, Mesiatsev simply changed its timeslot so that it would no longer coincide with the Central Committee members’ commute.⁸⁰

Yet the rationale behind the Central Television schedule in place by 1968-69 also reflected the priorities of the Central Committee both during and long after Mesiatsev’s tenure. From the late 1960s onward, Soviet television’s weekday evening schedule was designed to attract close to the maximum number of viewers, while balancing the interests of different audience groups (soccer and theater fans not always being the same people), and remaining within the limits of Soviet commitment to enlightenment and censorship of alternative poets and musicians. The aim was to retain them for as long as possible, in order to ensure a large audience for *Programma “Vremia”* and keep viewers from turning off their television sets and potentially tuning in to late-night foreign radio

⁷⁹ In April, 1969, the Chief Editor for News, N. Biriukov, was reprimanded for allowing changes to the broadcast time of news programs including *Vremia*. See GARF f. 6903 op.1 d. 962 l. 31.

⁸⁰ Interview with Nikolai Mesiatsev, Moscow, February 2007.

broadcasts. Within this larger context, the schedule made some effort to coordinate viewing, albeit primarily toward the goal of making the schedule more predictable, ensuring that viewers were able to find the entertaining content they were most interested in seeing. A 1968 document explained the changes to the 1968-69 schedule planned for 1969-70 as follows:

The main artistic program for the evening, from 7-8:30 pm, will continue to be aimed at the widest audience and include works in various genres, but their sequence will be changed in the new schedule. Before, on Mondays, for example, the schedule included musical TV plays, dramatic theater, productions of literary adaptations, and (pre-taped) sports broadcasts. Now, every artistic genre will be assigned to a particular day....this will be more convenient for the viewer and improve coordination...of the channels, preventing the broadcast of one kind of program (movies, music, literature, theater) on different channels.⁸¹

Regardless of this coordination of kinds of popular content over the course of a week, the evening schedule's exclusive devotion to news and entertainment was abundantly clear to the social-political programs desk staff: it was maintained despite their frequent protests. In July 1966, the social-political programs desk submitted a formal complaint to *Gosteleradio*'s leadership about the exclusion of their programs from evening timeslots. "We are interested in ensuring that social-political programs gather the largest possible viewing audience, capturing the widest possible range of social groups: workers, collective farmers, intelligentsia and especially youth," the complaint declared.

However, if you look closely at the current schedule for Central Television Channel 1, you can only conclude that the great majority of social-political programs are broadcast at times when they can only gather the smallest number of viewers. The most-watched time on television is the period from 7 pm to 10 pm. At that time the largest audience gathers at their screens. Nonetheless, social-political programs are almost never broadcast during those hours."⁸²

Weekday daytimes and weekends

The contents of the Channel 1 weekday evening schedule roughly mirrored those of Western European and American weekday evening schedules, which also featured primarily news and entertainment programming during "prime time." The Soviet weekday daytime schedule, however, was somewhat different. Rather than focusing content on distinct populations, housewives and retirees, who remained home during the day because they were outside the workforce, or carefully tracking the progress of time throughout the day, the Central Television daytime schedule in 1969-1970 mimicked the evening one.⁸³ Social-political programs and *Latest news* were relegated to the periphery

⁸¹ GARF f. 6903 op. 1 d. 973 l. 243.

⁸² "Ob uluchshenii postanovki politicheskoi propagandy po radio i televideniiu," Protokol #15 zasedaniia Komiteta po radioveshchaniu i televideniiu pri SM SSSR ot 22 July 1966, GARF f. 6903 op. 1 d. 892 l. 226.

⁸³ For a contrasting example, see Paddy Scannell's chapter on British television's "dailyness" in *Radio, Television, and Modern Life: A Phenomenological Approach* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 1996).

of a large bloc of artistic and entertaining content. The primary difference between the morning and evening schedules in 1969-70 was the absence of a morning broadcast of *Programma "Vremia,"* a shortcoming that was not remedied until 1977 when *Vremia* began to be rebroadcast (as a rerun of the previous night's edition) in the morning, albeit as the first program of the day, a position equivalent to morning news counterparts in the U.S. and Western Europe.

The resemblance between the morning and evening schedules on Central Television was due to the fact that the intended audience of the morning broadcast consisted of workers and schoolchildren who worked/attended school during the second shift and were unable to watch the evening broadcast. The size of this group, and their greater importance to the Soviet state than other daytime viewing groups (the elderly, the infirm, and housewives) were features specific to Soviet society. They help explain the absence of programs explicitly aimed at that most desirable of audiences in capitalist societies during this period, women working in the home.⁸⁴

On weekend days, by contrast, Soviet programmers did not have to choose between social groups. Since television programming ran all day it could accommodate targeted content for multiple constituencies, including programs with titles like "Village Hour" and "For Soldiers of the Soviet Army." The weekend schedule thus allowed programmers greater scope for realizing the conflicting goals of "Soviet" audience research and broadcast scheduling. The NMO quickly discovered that many Soviet citizens, particularly those outside Moscow, were choosing to spend weekend leisure time at their television sets. As a 1967 NMO report on a survey of audience size at different times of day and week put it, this high viewership presented an opportunity, suggesting that "Saturday evening schedules can be more saturated than weekday evenings, and, moreover, that Sunday daytime broadcasts may raise any serious theme without fearing that it will not reach an audience...the educational element [*element poznavatel'nosti*] should...be significantly strengthened."⁸⁵ In other words, Saturdays and Sundays would include both more of the most popular kinds of entertaining content as weekday evenings, namely live sports broadcasts and movies, but would also contain a much more substantial array of more enlightening and/or propagandistic programming. If we look at the weekend schedule in the late 1960s, however, we can see that even here how Central Television programmers balanced the desire to influence viewers with the competing imperative to please and retain them.

First, the scheduling day on both days was designed to mirror viewers' weekend routines. As a 1972 NMO report indicated, the balance of programming on Saturday and Sunday was designed to maximize viewer acceptance, and was based on ideas about viewers' likely preferences as their weekends unfolded. Sundays featured more "cultural-enlightening" and educational programming than weekdays or Saturdays, because

⁸⁴ The exception was a program begun in 1957, entitled "For you, women!" [*Dlia vas, zhenshchiny!*]. The mass-audience identity for Channel 1 and Orbita was also predicated on the simultaneous creation of the third and fourth broadcast channels when Ostankino opened, particularly the third or "instructional" [*uchebnoe*] program, which went on air November 4, 1967, where most of Central Television's directly didactic and enlightening content, ranging from foreign language classes to popular science films to entire correspondence courses for students studying for admission to institutions of higher learning, were relegated. See "Po gorizontali, po vertikali," *Sovetskoe radio i televideenie*, No. 11 (November, 1967): 49-50.

⁸⁵ GARF f. 6903 op. 3 d. 412 l. 5.

“Sunday is the second day of rest, when viewers are able, after some time to unwind, to devote a large part of their leisure time to expanding their worldview and deepening their knowledge.” Nonetheless, “Sunday is still a day of rest, and for that reason the broadcasting schedule on Sundays will contain a sufficient quantity of artistic programs, the number of which, though less than on Saturday, is greater than on weekdays.”⁸⁶ These features were already in place in the 1969-70 schedule. Although the daytime hours featured some social-political programs and some targeted at particular sub-audiences (children, collective farm workers, soldiers), Saturday evenings featured two blocs of very popular entertainment content, including variety shows, humor, the very popular youth comedy gameshow *KVN*, movies, and a musical “entertaining [*razvlekatel’naia*] program” [see figure 3]. As on weekdays, if viewers wanted to avoid content heavier than a movie or a concert on Saturday nights, they could easily do so.

Second, the educational and social-political content of the Saturday and Sunday schedule in 1969-70 shared several important features aimed at making them palatable to viewers during their weekend leisure time. As the 1972 NMO report noted, although educational programming made up a large percentage of the Sunday schedule, 16.5% of total broadcasting on Sundays versus 8.6% on weekdays and 7.5% on Saturdays, the very socially diverse weekend audience meant that all of these programs aimed to be accessible and interesting to any Soviet viewer. They were created, the NMO report stressed, “in a form that is engaging and accessible to the most diverse groups of viewers,” a fact which also limited their contents. No special broadcasts on the latest developments in industrial chemistry, most of these Sunday “educational” programs were so entertaining and covered topics so interesting to viewers that they were among the most popular (and now fondly remembered) shows on Soviet television in the 1960s and 1970s. For example the report listed “Musical kiosk,” and “Cinepanorama,” shows which featured news about current music and films, as well as performances and interviews by famous performers, and “Club of cine-travellers,” which featured short films on foreign life and geography. Interspersed with these shows on Sundays were musical programs disproportionately featuring popular, rather than classical, music, and children’s programs, which were also very popular with viewers.⁸⁷

Third, even those programs, like *Village Hour* and *For Soldiers of the Soviet Army*, which contained direct propagandistic messages and aimed at politically important audiences, were carefully designed to attract and retain viewers, including those outside the target group. *Village Hour*, for example, featured frequent intervals of folk dancing and singing, which appealed at least as much to urbanites as it did to actual collective farmers.⁸⁸ *For Soldiers of the Soviet Army* included a lengthy segment of dedications and song requests sent in by soldiers and their families, a popular tactic for engaging audiences on the radio in Britain and the United States as well. By the late 1970s, the tactic of interspersing “serious” content with appearances or performances by screen and musical celebrities was so common that it had a nickname among television workers: the “layer-cake” [*sloenyi pirog*] approach.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ GARF f. 6903 op. 48 d. 115 l. 9.

⁸⁷ Ibid., l. 10

⁸⁸ GARF f. 6903 op. 36 d. 41 l. 9-10.

⁸⁹ A. Shpikalov and V. Vladimirov, “Povyshat’ kachestvo raboty,” *Zhurnalist* No. 7 (July, 1979): 2-3, 6-7.

Finally, a large proportion of the social-political, educational, and artistic/entertaining programs on the Soviet weekend schedule were serial programs—they appeared at the same time every week, under the same title, with the same hosts and with a recurring opening song or other sign-on. These serial programs made up roughly 10% of the Saturday schedule and 13% of the Sunday schedule in 1972, versus .8% of the weekday schedule. As the 1972 NMO report put it, the use of serial programs “undoubtedly makes possible the development among viewers of consistent viewing habits, increases the size of the audience, strengthens the connection between television and viewer, and, most importantly, increases the effectiveness of broadcasting as a whole.”⁹⁰ Such objectives were in strong contrast with Bogomolov’s 1967 call in *Zhurnalist* for viewers to “watch less television.” By 1972, with immense sums invested in bringing television to the entire Soviet population, Central Television and the Central Committee were fully committed not only to using television to deliver state messages, but to ensuring those messages found and retained the largest audience possible, using strategies remarkably similar to those of public interest and commercial broadcasters in the West.⁹¹ This often meant prioritizing certain messages over others: to a large extent, direct propaganda programming lost out to forms like news and entertainment that could directly respond to and compete with the foreign radio voices.

The impact of “stagnation”

Central Television’s orientation toward the audience’s demands, as measured by sociological surveys, does not seem to fit with the broad policy and personnel changes that the Brezhnev-era state began to implement after the 1968 Prague Spring, and which have been grouped since Gorbachev under the name “stagnation.”⁹² The “stagnation” era at Central Television is most frequently dated to the arrival, in April 1970, of Sergei Georgievich Lapin as the Chairman of the State Committee for Radio and Television Broadcasting, replacing Nikolai Mesiatshev, the Chairman brought in during Khrushchev’s ouster in 1964. Lapin, a Central Committee member who had run the Soviet news wire service and held high-ranking posts in the diplomatic corps prior to arriving at State Television and Radio, where he held the reins from 1970 to 1985, became legendary during *perestroika* and after 1991, when television producers who were present for the transition in 1970 or worked under him later published memoir accounts and gave interviews about what they experienced as his autocratic style and, conversely, his impressive intellect.⁹³

⁹⁰ GARF f. 6903 op. 48 d. 115 l. 5, 11-12.

⁹¹ Mickiewicz observes the similarities between Soviet and American media audience research—since American audience surveys are conducted by broadcasters themselves, the quality of their methodology and reporting is far weaker than the work of American academic sociologists. See Mickiewicz, *Media and the Russian Public*, 8-9. The State Radio and Television Committee’s 1970 administrative promotion, to a Union-Republic level State Committee (with Television listed first in the committee’s new name), was followed by a tripling of its annual budget over the years 1971-1980, reaching 1.5 billion rubles annually by 1981. See Mark Koenig, “Media and Reform: the Case of Youth Programming on Soviet Television (1955-1990),” Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1995, p. 140.

⁹² See Alexei Yurchak’s discussion of the origins of the term “stagnation” in *Everything Was Forever, Until it was No More: the Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 7.

⁹³ See Koenig, 138-140.

Leaving aside for the moment the question of his impact on Central Television's content and working environment, Lapin's arrival in April, 1970 brought significant changes in the tone and conduct of audience research. The change in policy toward sociological research at the State Radio and Television Committee began, however, several months before his arrival, when Mesiatshev's removal was already being prepared.⁹⁴ In February, 1970, the Committee leadership met to discuss a recent scandal that had led to the firing of several NMO employees. In a survey conducted jointly with the Academy of Sciences' International Workers' Movement Institute, the NMO had asked viewers, alongside more standard questions regarding their viewing habits, about controversial social issues like unwed couples and, most scandalously of all, whether they felt that "the leadership, bosses" make mistakes "almost never," "less often than others," "as often as others," "more often than others," "very often," or "not sure." The NMO workers who had participated explained that they had been tasked with studying the "effect of radio and television on the formation of the worldview of various social groups," and that particular question had sought to test whether there was a correlation between viewing habits and trust in the state and Party leadership, as well as which kinds of viewers were more likely to be convinced by simply seeing an authority figure make an announcement, and which were more convinced by logical arguments.⁹⁵ Such directly political questions were, however, unacceptable, and the scandal marked the beginning of greater attention from the State Committee's leadership and the Central Committee above them to exactly what the NMO was asking and how.

In June, 1970, Lapin criticized the NMO's methods and conclusions in a meeting of the Committee's Party activists, and changes in the NMO's activities followed shortly thereafter.⁹⁶ Beginning in 1971, the Letter division's monthly and annual reports began to be preceded by a series of positive declarations (often not born out by the letter statistics that followed) about the population's positive response to direct propaganda programs, for example. "As we can see from [viewers'] letters," one such annual report began, "the programs dedicated to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union's July Plenum and to current questions of economics, as well as programs like *The Communist in our Time* were well received [by viewers]."⁹⁷ Such statements could be backed up by quotations from individual letters from Party members and activists, who were among Central Television's more active correspondents. They were not based on evidence drawn from surveys, or on claims about the perspective of the

⁹⁴ Mesiatshev's ouster was already being prepared by April, 1968, when the first draft of a memo critical of several errors in the coverage of Lenin on television under his leadership was signed by V. Stepakov and K. Simonov, the heads of the Central Committee's propaganda and communications divisions, respectively. "O sereznykh nedostatkakh v rabote TsT i merakh po dal'neishemu razvitiyu televideniya v SSSR." RGANI f. 5 op. 60 d. 28 ll. 23-64. These memos culminated in a list of candidates Stepakov recommended to head a new "Ministry of Television and Radio." However, in 1970 Stepakov himself was removed, along with Mesiatshev as part of a sweeping purge of ideological cadres in 1970. The official reason given for Mesiatshev's dismissal was these inappropriate representations of Lenin; Mesiatshev believes that was merely the justification Brezhnev's cohort in the Central Committee cooked up in order to dismiss him for opposing the expansion of a Brezhnev cult of personality on television, as well as for his ties to Shelepin. Interview with author, 2006. Koenig also mentions a story that Mesiatshev embarrassed himself while drunk at a reception and was dismissed for that reason. See Koenig, 142-144.

⁹⁵ GARF f. 6903, op. 1, d. 1045, ll. 196, 201.

⁹⁶ TsAOPIM f. 2930 op. 1 d. 1096, ll. 54-55.

⁹⁷ "Godovoi obzor pisem telezritelei za 1970 g." GARF f. 6903, op. 10 d. 101.

entire audience, but rather on the anecdotal feedback of a model audience. The NMO's sociological research activities were also significantly cut after Lapin's arrival. Although it was renamed the "Center for scientific programming (TsNP)" in September, 1970, the number of sociological surveys it conducted dropped from at least five in 1969 and at least six in 1970 (to judge from the reports on their results that have survived in the NMO/TsNP archive) to just one in 1971. That one was dedicated to the viewership *Leninist University of Millions*, a program aimed at a very small and specific audience, professional Party propagandists. Alongside this much smaller number of survey reports, there appeared analyses of programming written by the NMO/TsNP staff themselves—statistical reports on the contents of *Programma "Vremia"* over the course of a sample week, for example. This kind of analysis was also an important source of critical analysis and perspective, but it did not claim any external referent in the viewing audience.

Still, sociological survey research did not disappear entirely from the NMO's agenda during the first half of Lapin's tenure.⁹⁸ Moreover, despite this turn away from survey-based audience research after Lapin's arrival, the changes to the Channel 1 schedule were not as great as might be expected. Take, for example, the following schedules printed in *Pravda* for January, 1971:

Tuesday, January 12

10:15am Concert by the Children's choreography ensemble of the ZIL factory palace of culture
10:40 am "A glass of water"—film play
12:25 pm "Musical kiosk" [rerun from the previous Sunday]

5:10 pm Variety show with L. Mirov and M. Novitskii [two famous comic performers].
In color.
6:05 pm "Youth creations"—report from the Central exhibition hall.
6:30 pm "Leninist university of the millions" "The leading role of the working class in a socialist state."
7:00 pm Concert by the Russian folk song and dance ensemble of the Uralmash factory palace of culture.
7:30 pm Children's film. "Two captains" (in color).
9:00 pm "Vremia"—news program
9:30 pm "Classic Russian ballads [*Starinnyi russkii romans*]." Concert (in color).
10:05 pm "World of socialism" [a news and commentary journal featuring the politics, economics, and culture of socialist-bloc countries]
10:30 pm People's artist of the USSR T. Cheban. [a famous folk song performer]

Wednesday, January 13

11:15 am For children. "Nature's guardians"

⁹⁸ See for example GARF f. 6903 op. 48 dela 115 (1972), and 318 (1976). Moreover, sociological research into media consumption and leisure time budgets continued throughout the 1970s, and was published in both periodicals and books. See Mickiewicz, *Media and the Russian Public*, 1-17.

11:45 am “The Government Inspector” [Gogol]—dramatic film
2:00 pm Bandy. Dinamo (Moscow) vs. Zorkii (Krasnogorsk). 2nd half
5:10 pm For schoolchildren. “Encounters in the land of music”
5:35 pm “Celebration of a wheat farmer”—television essay
6:05 pm Cartoons. “Musicians of Bremen” and “Photographs” (in color)
6:30 pm Festival of the Soviet republics. Ukrainian SSR. Broadcast from Kiev.
8:00 pm “*Vremia*.” News program.
8:30 pm USSR figure-skating championship. Pair skating (free program).
9:50 pm “Vanina Vanini” Dramatic film (GDR).

On both of these days in 1971, *Programma “Vremia,”* the news program that was the centerpiece of the 1969-70 evening schedule, was still at the heart of the evening schedule and surrounded by artistic/entertaining content, although its timeslot was not yet firmly fixed at 9:00 pm, as it would be by 1972. Tuesday’s post-*Vremia* entertainment offerings were somewhat staid, the kind of thing that primarily interested older audiences. Not so Wednesday, with its foreign-made movie and figure skating, both very popular with almost all viewers.

Most significantly, television producers working for the Propaganda desk continued to complain that their programs were always aired at undesirable times, and scheduled irregularly, only when there was some kind of opening.⁹⁹ This was an explicit and consistent policy by Programming directorate, and one that even Lapin’s first vice chairman (effectively the second in command), Enver Mamedov, was not always able to alter. “Comrade Egorov [a director for the propaganda desk] has launched his new series, *A family’s honor*,” Mamedov told a November, 1972 Central Television Party committee meeting “...it’s good, it’s fulfilling its tasks, with lively portraits of people and all that. But...neither Comrade Egorov nor I can get the program on at 8 pm. Comrade Terekhin, Comrade Babakhan (of the Programming directorate) will not let us, they block the way, they will not let one of Egorov’s programs occupy such a golden spot.” That someone of Mamedov’s rank within the State Television and Radio Committee’s leadership could not always impose his will in a matter like this suggests that changes to the primetime schedule during “stagnation” were gradual and cautious. Moments later, Mamedov explained why such resistance to putting a directly propagandistic program on primetime might often be justified, although not in this case. “There’s some sense in their policy, that is, naturally we must be very careful about putting purely documentary programs on during these golden hours. But we are going to do so...”¹⁰⁰

Yet the introduction of “purely documentary” content into prime time remained very rare. Despite his reputation as a cultural hard-liner, Lapin apparently understood the necessity of providing popular content during those hours.¹⁰¹ In an article published in

⁹⁹ TsAOPIM, f. 2930 op. 2 d. 244 l. 8-9.

¹⁰⁰ TsAOPIM, f. 2930 op. 2 d. 241 l. 56.

¹⁰¹ Thus a 1971 letter report boasts that Central Television had showed more than 600 films that year, which led to the near elimination of viewer requests for more movies, something that had previously been in “every third letter.” GARF f. 6903 op. 36 d. 1 l. 540-541. Lapin’s own tastes were often overridden by the state’s most important television viewer, Leonid Brezhnev. Brezhnev himself is said to have intervened on behalf of particular popular shows that he or his wife enjoyed, such as the satirical-comedic serial “Kabachok 13 Stul’ev,” preventing their cancellation. Brezhnev’s tastes may also have been responsible

Zhurnalist in May 1972, Lapin described the need to consider viewer's preferences in creating the Central and local television and radio schedules. "When we talk about programs on economic themes, on production and producers," the article asserted, "...we need to always think about what place they occupy in the schedule as a whole, how the local and Central television schedules work together, are we keeping the necessary balance between text and music, the right balance of social-political, scientific-educational, and artistic programs." At a recent meeting of the directors of the Central Television content desks, he reported, a "Central Committee member and worker," A. V. Viktorov, had complained about too many talking heads [*razgovornye peredachi*] on television. "And this," the article continued,

from a Moscow television viewer, who can choose between four channels. But what about viewers in cities where there's only one television channel? Those cities are the majority in this country. And when news and propaganda programs displace musical, entertaining, sports programs, and movies, then those viewers are dissatisfied. It would seem that there's nothing easier than replacing an entertaining or musical program with one devoted to problems of production. You can even justify such a substitution with high ideals. But is such a substitution necessary?

Such a question was important, Lapin continued, because listeners and viewers had alternatives. "We should not forget," he wrote,

that we no longer have a monopoly on the airwaves, and that if our programs do not satisfy, then listeners can tune in to foreign broadcasts. Of course, this is not yet a threat for television. But on television too we need to be careful that viewers do not turn off their sets, that our programs do not put them to sleep...After a long work day, workers are within their rights to expect us to provide a chance to rest, listen to music, watch an interesting movie, be entertained, have a laugh. If television and radio are not going to create a good mood for viewers, then they will not attract them.¹⁰²

This attitude became even more prevalent during the second half of the 1970s, when the Central Committee issued several important decrees on propaganda that sought to make state messages more lively and audience-oriented.¹⁰³ As the 1970s wore on, Central Television's leadership continued to tweak the schedule in order to increase viewership during times when the radio "voices" were most active, and for particular key programs, especially the international news and commentary programs that proliferated during the 1970s in response to the threat of foreign radio.¹⁰⁴ Its overall shape, however,

for another popular aspect of the Central Television schedule—the extensive broadcast of soccer games. See Koenig, 139.

¹⁰² Sergei Lapin, "Tribuna liudei truda," *Zhurnalist* No. 5 (May, 1972): 14-16.

¹⁰³ For a discussion of the shake-up within the Party's ideological apparatus in the late 1970s, see Mark Charles Koenig, "Media and Reform: the Case of Youth Programming on Soviet Television (1955-1990)," Ph.D. Dissertation, Columbia University, 1995.

¹⁰⁴ These new news programs and the changes in Brezhnev's propaganda strategies during the late 1970s will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

had been set during the scheduling debates of the mid-late 1960s, and that changed very little.

Conclusions

By the end of the 1960s, Central Television had established a regular schedule that was explicitly oriented, during its most-watched hours, toward a mass audience. This schedule sought to attract and retain the largest possible audience for the evening news program, *Vremia*, by surrounding it with popular content that would ensure it an audience. Taken as a whole, however, the Central Television schedule reflected a careful balance between competing priorities: reaching the largest audience possible vs. reaching specific sub-audiences of particular importance to the state, and engaging viewers vs. ensuring that the First All-Union channel conveyed the Soviet state's most important economic and political messages to the entire populace.

Central Television's schedulers and their critics alike agreed that Central Television Channel 1 ought to strike this kind of balance. Channel 1 was, of course, the only television channel that reached nearly the entire country. In this sense it was different from radio, which had been multi-channel since the 1964 creation of a second All-Union radio channel, "Maiak," which alternated brief news broadcasts with popular music 24 hours a day in an attempt to attract young listeners and directly compete with foreign radio broadcasts. Central Television Channel 1's singularity for many viewers outside major cities meant an extra symbolic burden. As a 1967 Central Television report to the Central Committee put it,

Channel 1 is the main news, social-political, and cultural-artistic television channel in the Soviet Union, an all-Union, multi-nationality, international channel. It is intended for one of the largest mass-media audiences, highly diverse in its social-demographic composition.¹⁰⁵

Realizing this balance in practice, however, proved controversial. Many Party activist viewers and Central Television staffers working for the propaganda desk felt that the balance struck erred too far on the side of entertainment.¹⁰⁶ Provincial and rural viewers, whose perspective Lapin had described in his 1971 article (and which they expressed themselves in letters to Central Television), took the opposite view. The basic idea of "entertaining" programming also required a constant negotiation with Soviet standards of taste, political acceptability, and other questions on which everyone, from the Central Committee to viewers of different backgrounds, had an opinion.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, simply knowing what different kinds of viewers liked and disliked did not lead automatically to clear scheduling decisions. As was the case when the American networks had to decide whether to broadcast a performance by Elvis, Central Television faced frequent conflicts between attracting a large and youthful audience vs. provoking a deluge of outraged letters from older and more conservative viewers. Whether under

¹⁰⁵ RGANI f. 5 op. 59 d. 28 ll. 81-82.

¹⁰⁶ See for example Il'ia Petrov and Gennadii Sorokin, "Profil' i fas televizionnoi programmy," *Zhurnalist* No. 5 (May, 1970): 31-32.

¹⁰⁷ The problems of taste in popular music, clothing, and hairstyles of individuals appearing on television will be discussed in detail in chapters 4 and 5.

pressure from advertisers or censorious politicians, U.S. schedulers were often uncertain whether it was better to alienate one group or the other. This problem was at least as severe in the Soviet Union, where the political engagement of the young generation was a critical issue, but older Party members were a key constituency for the state. Finally, the coordination of local and central broadcasts to prevent awkward conflicts or duplication of content also proved nearly impossible, for reasons both technical and political.¹⁰⁸

Most of these dilemmas were familiar to public service and even commercial broadcasters in the United States and Western Europe, and, despite the distinctive ideological content of Soviet state messages, the Soviet approach to audience research and scheduling appears not to differ very substantially from those of European public service broadcasters, who shared a commitment to enlightening viewers with high cultural offerings, were ambivalent about television's cultural and political impact, and sought to distinguish themselves from the "American" commercial broadcasting model.

Yet despite the strong resemblance between the Central Television scheduling day and those of broadcasters in the U.S. and Western Europe, the creation of a recurring, viewer-oriented scheduling day revealed a larger problem for Soviet television. The routinized schedule was a better fit for a television system reaching and hoping to engage nearly the entire Soviet population than was the early television enthusiasts's vision of television as always a special occasion.¹⁰⁹ The scheduling day, week, month, and year also fit naturally into Soviet administrative culture, since it allowed most programs to be planned, written, and approved far in advance. But there was something about disruptions to that schedule that remained an essential part of television's form and mission, in the Soviet Union as elsewhere. Listening to foreign radio offered Soviet citizens news—itself a category of things out of the ordinary—and an experience apart from the routines of Soviet daily life. In order to compete with foreign radio, *Programma "Vremia"* had to include at least some of the disruptions foreign radio offered—news of world happenings and natural disasters, things that were, by virtue of being newsworthy, out of the ordinary, unplanned. Moreover, the very plannedness of the television schedule meant that there were also planned disruptions, and they were among the most popular kinds of content, including sports tournaments, the timing of which could not always be predicted or fit into the standardized slots before and after "*Vremia*"—at least not if they were to be broadcast live. Even holidays, the most foreseeable and plannable of disruptions to the schedule, seemed to demand content that was also a disruption of routines—special live programs from parades, concerts with rarely seen performers, and popular new movies, the broadcast of which Central Television could negotiate only a few times a year.

These disruptions required extra effort from broadcasters everywhere—someone was always unhappy when a basketball game preempted their favorite show—but they were uniquely problematic for Soviet television. We can sense the frustration of Central

¹⁰⁸ For example, local studios complained that they only knew when the *Orbita* satellite broadcasts would begin and end, not what they would contain. See GARF f. 6903 op. 1 d. 964 ll. 50-51. Local studios, whose broadcasting plans were dramatically cut once all-Union broadcasting became possible, also frequently disobeyed, broadcasting their own content over Channel 1, a major source of complaint from local viewers writing to Central Television. For the planned cuts to local broadcasting hours see GARF f. 6903 op. 1 d. 971. For complaints, which were particularly frequent about the Ukrainian local stations, see GARF f. 6903 op. 10 d. 79 l. 28a.

¹⁰⁹ See Chapter 1 of this dissertation.

Television's schedulers in their discussions of how to handle the conflict between planned programming and special events that could not be foreseen, or which otherwise disrupted the daily balance of content on Channel 1. Along with its proposals about the coordination of content across channels, and its insistence on a Soviet approach to audience research, the 1965 conference on television scheduling had raised the problem of "how to resolve the conflict between the necessity of advance planning of programs and the eventfulness, timeliness [*sobytiinost'*, *operativnost'*] of television." The majority of those present, the conference reported, supported the idea of dividing all broadcasting into two parts, one for "news" of every kind—political, economic, scientific, but also cultural-enlightening—and one for "thematic" programs that did not depend on the particular day, week, or even year they were broadcast. The news desk would handle everything timely or eventful, and all the other desks would focus on everything else.¹¹⁰

This solution proved impractical, yet it revealed the difficulty Soviet programmers faced with another kind of time essential to the experience of watching television. Not the dailiness or weekliness of it, which Central Television took in stride (although without much in the way of distinctive daytime content before the mid-1970s, it did so later), but rather the experience of television as unfolding progressively over the course of one's life, a constant and reliable presence punctuated by memorable events that mark distinctive moments in both history and one's personal life. In the United States one thinks of the Kennedy assassination, September 11, or, on a much more trivial scale, the untimely deaths and shotgun weddings of soap opera, in which the characters age at the same pace as their viewers.¹¹¹ Bound as it was to a particular account of history, one that demanded that extraordinary events and small ones alike serve as proof of that account's accuracy, Soviet Central Television faced unusual challenges when marking the passage of time.

It was thus no coincidence that the Central Television scheduling day was created simultaneously with its centerpiece, a news program entitled, also not coincidentally, *Time* [*Vremia*]. At the beginning of its first broadcast, the Chief Editor of the news desk, N.S. Biriukov, announced on air that "we named this program "Time" because we want it to be as dynamic, interesting, and rich [*nasyshchenna*] as our times."¹¹² The next chapter will describe the ways that Central Television sought to realize this ambition with the creation of "Time" and other news programs, as the first and most important response to the problem of time on Soviet television.

¹¹⁰ GARF f. 6903 op. 1 d. 886 l. 201.

¹¹¹ This is not to suggest that Soviet television viewers did not experience television this way—many people who grew up watching Soviet television recall television events, including the Kennedy assassination, in ways identical to their American and European counterparts. Instead, the problem was with covering Soviet life in this same manner.

¹¹² Quoted in N. Ivanovskaia, "O programme "Vremia"," *Sovetskoe radio i televidenie*, No. 5 (May, 1968): 30-33.

“We chose the musical symbol of our program specifically from this piece because it is an unusually broad, vivid, and effective symbol of Time—its driving rhythm, its unceasing movement, its all-encompassing breath. And this music also contains the image of Man, the master of Time, capable of unending overcomings of new horizons in life.”¹

--Commentary on *Vremia*’s 1969 musical sign-on, a passage from the opening overture of Georgii Sviridov’s music to the 1966 movie *Vremia-vpered!*, based on the 1932 novel of the same name by Valentin Kataev. Delivered on air at the beginning of the March 13, 1969 broadcast.

“While preserving the best traditions of news production, the program has become much more dynamic, and timely, more vivid and saturated.”²

--Comparison on the website of Russia’s First Channel of the news program *Vremia* in 2009 to its Soviet incarnation.

“The first layer of journalism is just learning how to do it, to see life in terms of events.”³

--Nicholas Lemann, in an address to the Columbia School of Journalism’s 2003 graduating class

The Cold War and the Making of *Programma “Vremia”*

Chapter 3

On January 1, 1968, Central Television aired the first broadcast of a new evening news program entitled *Time* [*Vremia*]. The chief editor of the news desk, Nikolai Biriukov, appeared at the beginning of the broadcast to explain the new program’s name. “We named this program *Time*,” he told viewers, “because we want it to be as dynamic, interesting, and saturated as our times.”⁴ Like a work of socialist realist art, the program was intended to reflect Soviet life as it was to be: fast paced, exciting, but with a transparent and singular meaning, a “panorama of time,” in which “excursions...from New York to Donetsk” and “brief visits to the builders of a gas pipeline and to film studios” were all “subordinated to a unified directorial vision, a single higher task.”⁵ Produced by the entire 170-person staff of Central Television’s news desk, combining content and genres from every part of Central Television, “multi-genre” and “multi-perspectival,” the program aimed to create a “television equivalent of the day...in which our very epoch speaks in the language of facts and events.”⁶

¹ GARF f. 6903 op. 26 d. 1003 efirnaia papka #1275

² From the the Channel 1 official site;

http://www.1tv.ru/owa/win/ort5_peredach?p_shed_name_id=12. Last accessed June 1, 2009.

³ Quoted in Anthony T. Carter, “Foreward,” in Ulf Hannerz, *Foreign news: Exploring the World of Foreign Correspondents* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), ix.

⁴ Quoted in N. Ivanovskaia, “O programme “Vremia”,” *Sovetskoe radio i televideenie*, No. 5 (May, 1968): 30-33.

⁵ Boris Iakovlev, “Eshche raz o Vremeni,” *Zhurnalist*, No. 2 (February, 1969), 27.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

Underlying these grandiose pronouncements was an unspoken worry. Soviet television news was in direct competition with radio news broadcasts from the BBC, Voice of America, Radio Free Europe, and Deutsche Welle. Soviet surveys conducted in the mid-1960s revealed, moreover, that Soviet people were listening and comparing Soviet news unfavorably with the Western competition: Soviet news was slow, boring, and left too much of real life out.⁷ Worse still, the monotone delivery of Soviet television news threatened to affect viewers' perceptions of the content of that news, which was, as *Vremia*'s producers and critics repeated over and over, Soviet life itself.

This was an intolerable situation, because news, and broadcast news in particular, had become the most important medium for Soviet Cold War counterpropaganda. Beginning in the early 1960s, but with growing strength in 1965-66, journalists and officials within Central Television and the Communist Party Central Committee called for thoroughgoing changes to the ways that Soviet news was produced and delivered.⁸ Among all existing media, the newest, television, seemed to hold the greatest promise as a competitor with foreign radio—its visual form was uniquely absorbing and, although viewers in border areas could watch foreign television, it was not yet possible to broadcast television signals to non-border areas of the Soviet Union.⁹

Vremia was created in response to these concerns: where previous Soviet news programs had been slow it would be fast, where they had been dull it would be dynamic and exciting, where information had been lacking, *Vremia* would provide it. Unlike previous news programs, *Vremia* would properly convey the dynamism of Soviet life, providing, as the head of the Central Television news desk had put it in 1966, "a living reflection of [Soviet] accomplishments and the people who achieved them."¹⁰

This "living reflection" turned out to be difficult to produce to the satisfaction of *Vremia*'s many audiences, in Soviet homes, in Central Television's executive offices on Piatnitskaia Street in Moscow, and within the Central Committee's radio and television section. *Vremia* was intended to compete directly with the speed and style of Western radio broadcasting; it was also explicitly modeled on Western evening news programs, which Central Television staff and Central Committee officials alike understood to be a powerful medium for influencing audiences. Yet its content—the superiority of the Soviet way of life, and the Party's leading role in creating that way of life—was to be distinctly Soviet. This posed a problem of genre, since the production of news in postwar Europe and the United States was set, this chapter will argue, in a different historical framework than Soviet news, one characterized by conflict, unpredictability and an unknown future. Soviet news was obliged to compete with Western news that was produced with other objectives, and which saw different kinds of narratives and events as "newsworthy."

⁷ Central Television's audience research is discussed in detail in Chapter 2 of this dissertation. For an example of Central Television research revealing extensive listenership and negative comparisons with Soviet news, see State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF) f. 6903 op. 3 d. 408 l. 6.

⁸ For a 1966 report on foreign broadcasting and a 1965 letter from the Chair of *Gosteleradio* to the Central Committee *apparat*, see Russian State Archive of Recent History (RGANI) f. 5 op. 58 d. 25 ll. 134-146 and RGANI f. 5 op. 33 d. 227 ll. 49-50.

⁹ Kristin Roth-Ey, "Finding a Home for Television in the USSR, 1950-1970," *Slavic Review* Vol. 66, No. 2 (Summer, 2007), 279.

¹⁰ GARF f. 6903 op. 1 d. 905 l. 13.

Faced by contradictory pressures—to mimic foreign news formats but document the gradual realization of the Party's promises about progress toward communism, to give viewers rapid, direct access to domestic and foreign events and people but ensure they drew the right conclusions, and to reflect Soviet reality in a way that viewers would recognize without admitting weaknesses before listening enemies—Soviet television's producers and censors continually sought to make *Vremia* more effective as both a documentary reflection of Soviet life and a counterweight to foreign radio broadcast news.

As they balanced these two objectives, they discovered an awkward fact: it was far easier to produce Western-style news coverage of events taking place outside Soviet borders. The result was a marked and uncomfortable divergence between the style and content of coverage of domestic and foreign news within every evening broadcast of *Vremia*. This contrast was, as everyone recognized, not in the Soviet Union's favor. Juxtaposed with foreign events, Soviet life appeared static and dull. Groups ranging from Central Television executives and ambitious journalists, to astute television viewers and Central Committee *apparatchiks*, expressed alarm at this situation and proposed solutions. In all cases, the problem was presented as having extremely serious ideological consequences. In a 1967 journal article, a former television producer turned critic, Sergei Muratov, harshly criticized one of *Vremia*'s predecessors, a show called, simply, *Television News*. He described "endless shots of meetings, openings, closings, award ceremonies, ribbon-cuttings, factory machinery, and applauding people...Uniform shots and uniform phrases, astonishingly similar to one another. Not long ago," he noted, the program's anchors had read "a piece about one factory while showing footage of another, and they didn't notice the mistake until after the broadcast."¹¹ This kind of slip-up was extremely dangerous, he warned. *Television News* "supposedly gives us a panorama of time," but instead "creates in the viewer a sense of the boringness of this time. Do we always understand," he asked, "the responsibility of television at that moment, when the viewer goes up to his television set and, with chagrin, turns off THE PRESENT DAY? [capitalized in the original]."¹²

Six years later, in 1973, the Vice Chair in charge of television of the State Committee for Television and Radio Broadcasting (henceforth, Gosteleradio), Enver Mamedov, was bemoaning the same situation, this time on *Vremia*. "As paradoxical as it sounds," he began,

the international part of *Vremia*, the part covering foreign events, is often much more vivid. This footage is usually more dynamic, as a rule it is not accompanied by text. These short frames show great and often dramatic events in different corners of the world.

Many, many people, he continued, "contrast the somewhat anemic, sluggish [*vialyi*] development of events that takes place on screen when we're talking about the Soviet Union with the fast, rhythmic, energetic coverage of international life that follows."¹³ The

¹¹ Sergei Muratov, "Effekt vozdeistviia," *Zhurnalist* No. 2 (February, 1967): 29-31.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ "Stenogramma otchetnogo partsobraniia pervichnoi partiinoi organizatsii Tsentral'nogo televiedeniia," Central Archive of the Social and Political History of Moscow (TsAOPIM) f. 2930 op. 2 d. 440 l. 69.

situation, he concluded, was urgent and could not be tolerated long term; what was needed was an analysis of why this was happening.

This chapter will attempt to answer Mamedov's question. The answer matters as a study in the "contradictions" of late Soviet ideology and the way that Cold War pressures exposed them. But it also suggests the importance of attending to the vibrant and tumultuous political debates that took place behind the scenes of the production of some of the most famously stultifying language and imagery of the "stagnation" era. The repeated attempts to make Soviet domestic news "dynamic" demonstrate the highly political and controversial nature of what Alexei Yurchak calls the "formalization" of Soviet ideology inside the late Soviet state.¹⁴ Most importantly, a key group of young media elites emerged from the 1970s and early 80s frustrated by the Central Committee's unwillingness to implement their ideas for revitalizing Soviet domestic news. After 1985, they had the chance to try out the programming ideas they had proposed, and they rose quickly to extraordinarily powerful positions in politics and the media during *perestroika* and after 1991.

Answering Mamedov's question requires a close examination of how *Vremia* was produced, what solutions were proposed, and why those solutions failed, could not be implemented, or only made the problem worse. First, however, we must consider the special nature of "news" in the Soviet Union, and compare Soviet news narratives with news elsewhere. The following is the briefest possible sketch of the emergence of a key strand of Soviet journalism: one that saw the primary task of news as documenting the unfolding of socialist history as it progressed toward communism, fulfilling the Party's promises.

The distinctiveness of Soviet news

The express task of Soviet journalism was the enlightenment and mobilization of the population toward the construction of Communism and their own transformation into a new kind of socialist person.¹⁵ In the years after Stalin's death, the main pathway for this process of enlightenment and mobilization increasingly took a particular form: Soviet domestic news would reflect the achievements of Soviet society—its continuing progress

¹⁴ Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: the Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 47-50.

¹⁵ For more detail see Chapter 1 of Matthew Lenoe, *Closer to the Masses: Stalinist Culture, Social Revolution, and Soviet Newspapers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), and Thomas Wolfe, *Governing Soviet Journalism: the Press and the Socialist Person After Stalin* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005), 2, 6-7. A full comparison of the fields of post-war journalism in the Soviet Union and in any of the Western countries whose news was reaching Soviet audiences via foreign radio broadcasting is naturally beyond the scope of this chapter. Instead, I will focus on the most salient differences, those that directly contributed to the widely perceived divergence between Soviet and foreign news on *Vremia*. In doing so I adopt the broad perspective underlying semiotic approaches in cultural anthropology, cultural Marxism, and media studies of the history of Western journalism, which focus our attention on the way that newspaper texts "gain their political meaning from their manipulation of cultural codes" and encourage us to attend to "the importance of text, genre, representation, and the historical connection between texts and contexts." (Wolfe, 3). As a basis for comparison, I will draw on Herbert Gans' empirical analysis of the contents of American television newscasts during the late 1960s and 1970s. Herbert J. Gans, *Deciding What's News: A Study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek, and Time*, 2nd Ed., Visions of the American Press, Ed. David Abrahamson (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2004).

toward communism—and the people who accomplished them. Readers or viewers, in turn, would recognize this transformation in the events and people portrayed, and, it was hoped, then in their own surroundings. Enlightenment and mobilization thus became closely linked: inspired by evidence of the fulfillment of the Party's promises and the scale of their collective achievement, Soviet people would redouble their work on themselves and in production. The emergence of this particular account of how news narratives would influence viewers reflected a key aspect of post-Stalin culture, the turn from coercion to persuasion as the key mode for mobilizing Soviet citizens.¹⁶ This emphasis on persuasion made the press's role in documenting the immanent quality of everyday Soviet life and the existence of new Soviet men all the more crucial.¹⁷

There were other sources of this marked search, during the Khrushchev era, for evidence of progress toward communism. These included the raising of popular expectations of greater comfort after the enormous sacrifices during Stalin's industrialization and WWII; the ticking of the millenarian clock almost five decades after 1917; and, perhaps most importantly, Khrushchev's charismatic approach to Cold War competition with the United States, culminating in his 1961 declaration that Soviet people would see communism in their lifetimes. In this environment, journalists sought to instruct viewers about the existence of a socialism that was already being realized in everyday life, by regular Soviet people, if not precisely in the terms set forth by the Party. Their articles focused on regular people who were practicing a *non-coerced* belief in socialism, a belief which journalists themselves in turn demonstrated via this immanent approach to Soviet reality.¹⁸

These ideas in Thaw-era journalism were uniquely pronounced and enduring on television. In the late 1950s, a group of early television workers, trained as journalists or cinematographers, and sympathetic members of the Moscow artistic intelligentsia saw the new medium as ideally suited for creating this kind of revelatory experience in viewers. Television's visual nature, instantaneity, and intimate size and setting in the home suggested, to these television "enthusiasts," the possibility of a medium that would realize the visions of early Soviet cinematographers by allowing viewers to penetrate the surface of reality, exposing the true nature of things, that is, the immanence of the future in the present.¹⁹ This would apply equally to sights of everyday life, particularly Moscow street scenes, and to individuals, with whom television would facilitate an intimate,

¹⁶ Wolfe, 109. This particular linkage of evidence of socialism's arrival with renewed commitment to building socialism was already in evidence in the Stalin era, at least since Stalin's famous speech in November, 1935 announcing that "life has become better, life has become merrier." In that speech, Stalin directly linked the recognition of socialist accomplishments (and enjoyments of their fruit) with the inspiration of individual citizens to new heights of achievement. The full quotation reads "The founding of the Stakhanovite movement served most of all to improve radically the material condition of the workers. Life has become better, Comrades. Life has become merrier. And when life is merry, work goes quickly. Hence high norms of production. Hence heroes and heroines of labor. This most of all is the root of the Stakhanovite movement." Cited in Jeffrey Brooks, *Thank You Comrade Stalin! Soviet Public Culture from Revolution to Cold War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 89.

¹⁷ Wolfe, 47-50.

¹⁸ Wolfe, 71.

¹⁹ See Chapter 1 of this dissertation for a full discussion of early Soviet theories of television as a medium. See also Kristin Roth-Ey, *Mass Media and the Re-Making of Soviet Culture, 1950s-1960s*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Princeton University, 2003, especially Chapter 5.

penetrating contact, a look into the soul.²⁰ Brezhnev's assumption of power brought a swift rejection of Khrushchev's charismatic approach to economic reform and the timeline of Soviet eschatology. The role of television news in representing the realization of the future in the present, however, remained constant. There were important changes—the role of critical pieces describing a gap between journalists' and the Party's understanding of socialism and socialist persons was dramatically circumscribed, and the present realization of "developed socialism" replaced the arrival of communism "in our lifetimes." Still, throughout the 1970s, television journalists continued to be exhorted to find evidence in everyday life, among ordinary people, of the true nature and direction of Soviet history.

This understanding of the nature and purpose of "news" had several specific effects on Soviet domestic news stories. The first was in the understanding of what qualified as an "event." What defined an event for Soviet domestic news was its status as evidence of the fulfillment of the Party's promises and demonstration of the direction of Soviet history.²¹ Examples of this kind of story were profiles of model workers and farmers that stressed their inspiring moral and spiritual qualities and/or their advances in production, or evidence of material improvements in their working or living conditions.

These kinds of stories suffered, however, from an extremely weak connection to the particular day or even year in which they were broadcast. That connection was supplied, in U.S. news stories from the same period, by a definition of eventfulness or newsworthiness that focused on conflict. Although American evening news broadcasts did include stories without a direct link to the day on which they were broadcast, including what are known as "human interest stories," these were a tiny percentage of evening news stories in the late 1960s and 70s.²² Only one fifth of evening news programs featured people who were not leading national politicians or famous criminals. Of that fifth, the most frequent "unknowns" to make it onto the news were "protesters, " "rioters, " and "strikers" (40% of stories in 1967), "victims" (33%), and "alleged and actual violators of the law" (8%).²³ Unpredictability was another central theme that underlay most newscasts. Would student protests end in violence? How many lives would be lost if rescue efforts failed after a natural disaster? Even when the events reported were not violent or dramatic, nor more than tenuously tied to the events of the particular day on which they were broadcast, they were presented as installments in a story of ongoing conflict between political factions (Congress versus the President, Democrats versus Republicans), between old and new societal norms, or between good guys and bad guys. Soviet domestic news, tasked with providing "a living reflection of [Soviet] accomplishments and the people who achieved them," could not reflect such fundamental elements of everyday life as uncertainty and conflict.²⁴

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ellen Propper Mickiewicz, *Split Signals: Television and Politics in the Soviet Union* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 28-30.

²² Hannerz, 31-32. Hannerz also mentions that such stories, while not necessarily strongly temporally specified, are often tied to what he calls "hard news," which he defines as "major, unique events, highly temporally specified, with consequences that insist on the attention of newspeople and their audiences."

²³ Gans, 13. Data are for 1967.

²⁴ Quote is from a 1966 address by the Chief of the Central Television News Desk. GARF f. 6903 op. 1 d. 905 l. 13. This definition of an "event" was an explicit matter of policy among Central Television's highest executives, who forbade most direct coverage of unpredictable events like natural disasters. Coverage of

The second characteristic of Soviet domestic news stories that most contributed to the gap between foreign and domestic news programs on *Vremia* was a particular understanding of how portraying model people on screen would affect viewers. The intelligentsia television “enthusiasts” of the 1950s and 60s saw the new medium as a site for transcendent connections between viewers and model socialist persons, people whose humanity was fully realized and could be transparently displayed on television for emulation. The people these enthusiasts had in mind only rarely included workers; foremost they defined this kind of fully developed screen personality [*lichnost'*] as a member of the intelligentsia, or an onscreen television professional, such as a journalist or newsreader/anchor [*diktor*.]²⁵ From its first public statement on television in 1960, the Central Committee made clear that it disagreed with this understanding of the proper heroes of the small screen; television should be directed at the least literate, and focus on working heroes in whom less educated viewers could recognize themselves.²⁶ This dispute, however, distracts us from the similarities in how the transcendent connection between viewer and model person on screen was supposed to happen. For both groups, the encounter with a model person on screen was supposed to suspend time, transporting the viewer in an intense experience of recognition, emotional connection, even rapture. As a holiday of sorts, this kind of “news” was not expected to fit in the time constraints of other kinds of “news,” and was thus typically substantially longer than a short newswire item.

We can get a sense of the kind of news programs these ideas engendered from the premier television news program of the Khrushchev era, and the key predecessor to *Vremia, Estafeta novostei* [News Relay]. First broadcast in December, 1961, *News Relay* was shaped by a very different Cold War moment than that which led to the creation of *Vremia* seven years later. Its musical sign-on, written for the show by the composer Liudmila Liadova and set to a poem by the poet Boris Dvornyi, linked the new program to a peak moment for Soviet technology and Cold War hopes, Gagarin’s return from space, which had been broadcast live across Europe (to the immense chagrin of U.S. government officials, who had not yet established direct trans-Atlantic broadcasting).²⁷ “People of five continents,” the song began, “we call on you/ to help friendship, freedom, and peace flourish on our planet/ Over our planet communism dawns/ and like a rocket to the stars/ flies the [relay] baton/ of the country of October!” Like its theme song, *News Relay* had a festive, triumphal air—it was a celebration of Soviet achievements that had genuinely earned world recognition, and an announcement of the rebirth of the intelligentsia as the new heroes of Soviet culture.

The program’s creators, including the program’s first and most famous host, Yuri Fokin, and cultural elites, including the writer Yurii Teplov and the ballet dancer Anna Lepeshinskaia, saw the program not only as a weekly news review, but as a “club, where

local conflict, in the form of bad actors like corrupt factory bosses, was permissible at some times, but always in the context of the resolution of these problems.

²⁵ See Chapter 1 of this dissertation.

²⁶ The text of the decree is available in *KPSS o sredstvakh massovoi informatsii i propagandy*, Second supplemented edition (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1987), 539-545.

²⁷ James Schwoch, *Global TV: New Media and the Cold War, 1946-1969* (Urbana-Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 118.

very interesting, very brilliant, very unusual people will go.”²⁸ The essential qualities of television news, as they saw it, were liveness and a prominent role onscreen for a charismatic and authoritative journalist, speaking in his own voice directly to viewers, engaging viewers in one-on-one conversation. As a live, spontaneous encounter and conversation between journalist or artist and viewer, therefore, *News Relay* could not be bound by scheduling constraints. A weekly review of the news, it was always broadcast on Friday nights as the last program of the evening so that its end time could be flexible, allowing Fokin to include appearances by guests who might drop by the studio unexpectedly.²⁹

Fokin’s role on screen was far more prominent than that of, for example, Walter Cronkite in the United States, whose reputation as an authoritative figure far exceeded his actual editorial interventions during the average newscast. Indeed, despite its great length, *News Relay* contained very little actual news—only ten or twelve items in a show that routinely exceeded its planned hour and a half length.³⁰ By 1965, as concern about competition from foreign radio broadcasts grew, the program, like its ecstatic musical sign-on, came to seem out of step with a more threatening international environment. Leonid Zolotarevsky, a young journalist who worked on the show, remembered how the show came to seem inappropriately festive by the mid-1960s. “We listened to the familiar song over and over,” he recalled, “and observed that it sounded too jubilant [*slishkom prazdnichno*] for a weekly review of the news.”³¹ The beginning of the show’s end, as its producers saw it, was the decision, in 1965, to confine it to an hour-long slot in the Friday night schedule.³²

Defining “counter-news”

By 1965-66, Central Television executives were regularly voicing their concerns about the inability of television news, as it was currently produced, to compete with foreign radio broadcasts.³³ Lengthy, boring stories were a central area of concern. In November, 1966, Nikolai Biriukov, the chief editor of the Central Television News desk [*Glavnaia redaktsiia informatsii*], addressed a group of television producers, executives, and critics who had gathered in Moscow for a conference on the “problems of television and radio news.” “It seems to me,” he told the assembled audience, “that we need to introduce the concept of “counter-news” [*kontrinformatsiia*]. After all,” he continued, “our ideological opponents build their programs primarily on news—very short, laconic reports, selected in such a way as to seem at first glance entirely objective.” With its visual nature, mass distribution, and ability to draw the viewer in, Biriukov stressed,

²⁸ This was a frequent way in which television producers conceived of the medium as a whole in the late 1950s and early 1960s, as was reflected in the names of several programs founded in those years, including “Club of cine-travelers,” “Club of the merry and quick-witted.” See Kristin Roth-Ey’s discussion of the nature of these television “clubs,” in “Mass Media,” 366-367 and 380-383.

²⁹ Zolotarevsky, 7. These guests included nearly every Soviet celebrity of the early 1960s, from actors and musicians to all of the cosmonauts.

³⁰ For a typical script see GARG f. 6903 op. 26 d. 405 efirnaia papka #9251.

³¹ Zolotarevsky, 8.

³² Ibid., 10.

³³ See for example GARG f. 6903 op. 3 d. 408 l. 6.

television news was the best medium for this new form of counterpropaganda.³⁴ In order to compete with short and laconic foreign news broadcasts, however, Soviet broadcast news first had to be sped up.

Biriukov and his colleagues in Central Television's leadership in 1966 did not intend to change the content of Soviet domestic news. Although brevity might help make Soviet news appear more dynamic, *kontrinformatsia* could not simply imitate Western broadcast news—the latter was directly critical of the Soviet Union and demanded a response as well. As Cold War counterpropaganda, Soviet news needed to emphasize the superiority of the Soviet way of life.³⁵ After Khrushchev's rash promises that the USSR would catch up with the U.S. in the area of consumer goods and living standards, Soviet ideologists in the mid-1960s began to try to shift the focus of the rivalry away from material considerations and toward ethical and spiritual values, specifically, the transformation of the human individual and Soviet society.

This was the content that Biriukov proposed for Soviet news in his description of what distinguished Soviet domestic news from its capitalist competitors. The content of Soviet news, he began, "is the revelation, in the most diverse cases and in everyday events, of the greatness of the Soviet people's achievement. The reflection of life in the world's first socialist state." In this sense, he continued "its ideological-political direction and its methods are fundamentally different from the principles and content of news in bourgeois countries, although, he noted, Western news was often "more professionally produced" than Soviet news. What would more "professionally produced" Soviet news look like? Biriukov proposed that it too would feature "the Soviet person," but portray him "not statically, but dynamically, in his work which is directed...toward the realization of our highest goal, the building of communism." This work could be of any kind, Biriukov added. The most important thing was that the final product be "not a chain of frozen portraits, but a living reflection of our accomplishments and the people who achieved them."³⁶

At the Conference on Problems of Television and Radio News, Biriukov envisioned a new Soviet newscast that would bring together these various news genres in an organic and hierarchically organized whole, beginning with brief, laconic oral reports and building toward longer reports from outside the studio. "In the beginning [of the report] we include the most general items, then we reinforce them visually," Biriukov explained. "That way, we prepare viewers to receive longer *reportazh*-form pieces as the culmination of the entire news broadcast."³⁷ In order to maintain viewer interest up to this point, and ensure that what resulted was a "living reflection" and not a "chain of frozen portraits," what was needed were changes to the pacing, organization, and camera work of Soviet TV news. Here the conference's organizers turned to the example of Western television news broadcasting.

³⁴ "Stenogramma zasedanii televizionnoi sektsii vsesoiuznogo soveshchaniia po problemam radio i teleinformatsii g. Moskva, 23-26 Nov. 1966," GARF f. 6903 op. 1 d. 905 ll. 8-11.

³⁵ Denise J. Youngblood, "Whose Cold War? Soviet Cold War Films and the Soviet Audience, 1948-1964," conference presentation, AAASS 2008, Philadelphia, PA.

³⁶ GARF f. 6903 op. 1 d. 905 ll. 10-11.

³⁷ GARF f. 6903 op. 1 d. 905 l. 13.

The speed and dynamism of BBC television news

One of the highlights of the conference was a screening of Soviet television news programs followed by two news programs from the BBC, *Newsroom* and *24 Hours*. After the screening, a graduate student of psychology from Leningrad State University, V.V. Boiko, delivered a speech comparing the Soviet and British newscasts, and stressing the way that the latter's speed and lack of visual and temporal transitions made the program more dynamic. The BBC's *Newsroom* opened, Boiko observed, with a "kaleidoscopic," rapid-fire overview of the stories to come later in the broadcast. This helped attract viewers to watch the program—a quick mention of something that interested them would help draw them into viewing; moreover the fast-paced summaries of each story allowed the viewer "to adjust to the pace of the program...be drawn into the businesslike atmosphere of the program," and sense "that watching the program won't take up a lot of time, even if you're in a hurry to get up from the television."³⁸ Contrast that, Boiko continued, with the typical opening of a broadcast of *Television News*, Central Television's daily news program.

Program logo—music—the lights dim—the anchorman on camera. V. Balashov pauses as if to wait for someone ducking into the last row of the immense audience to which he, a popular Central Television newsreader, is going to read the news. [He waits] as if he had not a care in the world. Now he can say "Good evening...dear comrades!" Now let's place our left hand more comfortably on our right, adjust our head position over the sheet of paper with the text and: "Today in the USSR..."

In the time that took, Boiko wryly observed, the BBC had already "delivered ten photo-illustrated previews, already conveyed the contents of the newscast, already won the attention of viewers."³⁹

Soviet television news also suffered from an excessively filmic approach, Boiko noted—Soviet cameramen proved their professional merit with lengthy panning and transition shots, which were simply eliminated on the BBC's news shows in favor of rapid cuts. The Soviet approach was intended to convey a "certain logic" relating different segments, Boiko noted, and the use of rapid cuts had been criticized in the Soviet Union as a "psychological strategy" used "calculatingly" by foreign television. This was nonsense, Boiko asserted—the point of editing film on the BBC newscast was to pack the maximum information into the minimum time.⁴⁰ A typical BBC newscast was delivered at something like 180 words per minute, Boiko reported. Leningrad radio, by contrast, was read at only 82 words per minute.⁴¹ The speed difference had an impact on effectiveness, Boiko claimed—the BBC news commentators' reading was more emotional, conveyed more meaning, than that of the Soviet newsreaders. At a pace of only 82 words a minute, it became difficult, Boiko argued, to pay attention, or even follow the meaning.

³⁸ GARF f. 6903 op. 1 d. 905 l. 135-136.

³⁹ Ibid. 136-137.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 139.

⁴¹ Ibid. 138.

The call for authoritative journalists on screen

Boiko's speech suggested that creating dynamism was simply a matter of applying a group of methods—fast cuts, a rapid-fire overview of stories ahead at the beginning of the broadcast, journalists or newsreaders who simply talked faster. Other conference participants, however, directed their criticism toward particular kinds of content, particularly official newsreel [*ofitsial'naia khronika*], which, they felt, was especially responsible for the troubling monotony of Soviet domestic coverage on *Television News*. The question was naturally a sensitive one, since official newsreel reported on the activities of the country's highest leadership, and, for these officials, appearance on television was a carefully regulated privilege.⁴² The outcome of these rules, however, was footage that was lengthy, slow, boring and overly focused on ceremonial activities, which naturally lacked visual drama.

In an essay in *Zhurnalist*, Sergei Muratov proposed a solution—replacing *ofitsial'naia khronika* with reporting by qualified journalists, appearing on screen and commenting on events. For Muratov, the boringness of *ofitsial'naia khronika* was directly linked to the “anonymity” and affectlessness of the newsreader. The era of newsreaders, Muratov argued, belonged in the Stalinist past, when “the geography of life around us was limited to *ofitsial'naia khronika* and officious ceremonies,” and “events outside screamed and roared [*bushevali*], but on air they became quiet, paralyzed by the even voice of the unflappable reader [*nevozmutimyi informator*].” What was needed, Muratov believed, were television commentators, hosts, and journalists who were experts in their fields and therefore able to comment on the events and people featured on television, helping viewers to understand their meaning. The models for such journalists were a group of prominent television performers in the 1960s who led Central Television programs on a variety of topics—film, war heroism, medicine. The popularity of these shows, Muratov argued, revealed that viewers preferred an “independently thinking conversant” over a newsreader.⁴³

The attack on newsreaders saw them as lacking both intellectual and ideological substance—unlike a journalist with expertise in a given field, they did not have special knowledge of what they were reading about. More seriously, however, television producers and directors, as well as journalists, began to charge that most newsreaders also lacked the depth of political knowledge and commitment that, they argued, were essential to engaging and influencing viewers, conveying the full import of political events. These claims had a strongly gendered flavor, since a majority of the newsreader corps were women. As V. S. Turbin, Chief Director of Literary and Dramatic Programs at Central Television, announced at a Party meeting in 1969, “a newsreader can be charming, and very beautiful, and have a stylish hairstyle, and a nice smile, it's all very nice, and the words are nice.” But, he continued, like an actor who brings the baggage of his whole life on stage, “...we're talking about there being, behind these words, behind these charming smiles a deep conviction and consciousness,” something most

⁴² Nikolai Mesiatsev, interview with author, Moscow, February 2007; Eduard Sagalaev, interview with author, Moscow, March 2007.

⁴³ Sergei Muratov, “Effekt vozdeistviia,” 29.

newsreaders, he argued, could not provide. This underlying belief, Turbin concluded, “should be present in all of our broadcasting, constantly letting our ideas shine forth.”⁴⁴

The late 1960s was not, on its surface, a particularly auspicious time to propose that members of the intelligentsia be given enormously important roles as intermediaries between the Party and the population. The 1965-66 trial of Siniavsky and Daniel, the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, and countless smaller crackdowns on individual journalists and articles in the press made clear that the Party would no longer tolerate a journalism whose definition of socialism challenged the Party’s renewed emphasis on authority and hierarchy.⁴⁵ This is perhaps why Soviet journalists seeking to preserve their prominent role in defining and interpreting socialism during the Thaw began in the late 1960s to argue that, far from threatening the Party’s control of ideological discourse, their individualized, educated voices could be its most convincing messengers.

The committed journalist that Turbin and others imagined at the helm of a program like *Vremia* would not simply make the news more personal and engaging for viewers—as the TV enthusiast and critic Muratov put it, the vivid individual on screen made possible “a new approach to reality.”⁴⁶ This understanding of the journalist was built upon what might seem like a contradiction: the quality that separated him from the newsreaders, his experience, knowledge, and ability to “think independently,” was precisely the quality that enabled him to convey to viewers the Party’s preferred interpretation of the events or people featured in a news broadcast, since a fully realized individual was one whose views were naturally in harmony with the Party. What was effective about an authoritative journalist, in other words, was his seeming free choice of Soviet ideology—there they were, qualified experts, capable of independent thinking, conveying a profoundly felt Party-mindedness to viewers. As one television enthusiast and Central Television producer, Georgii Kuznetsov, wrote in 1969, “social psychology long ago uncovered a fundamental principle [*zakonomernost'*]: the more vivid, unique, and inimitable the individual on screen, the better that person can convey socially significant [facts] to the viewer and the greater his influence on the audience.”⁴⁷ This individuality did not, however, have to include the freedom to articulate a position that corrected the Party line. “The journalist working on screen simply does not have the right to make an error,” Kuznetsov wrote. “He must be able to orient himself correctly in a given situation, not relying on guiding orders [*rukovodiashchie ukazaniia*]. The right to one’s own opinion” on television, Kuznetsov wrote, “is determined by the journalist’s competence, that is, by the extent of his conviction in the rightness of the Party

⁴⁴ “Stenogrammy sobranii partiinyykh aktivov o podgotovke k 100-letiiu so dnia rozhdeniya V.I. Lenina i o rabote po povysheniiu marksistsko-leninskogo obrazovaniia.” TsAOPIM f. 2930 op. 1 d. 904 l. 47. Turbin may or may not have been right about the political committedness of some of the newsreaders—there are several 1966 references in Central Television’s Party archive to the failure of newsreaders Anna Shilova and Svetlana Zhil’tsova to attend their required courses at the University of Marxism-Leninism, and of “unworthy behavior” by the newsreaders Ershova and Morgunova. See TsAOPIM f. 2930 op. 1 d. 384 ll. 8-13 and l. 31.

⁴⁵ Wolfe, 110-115.

⁴⁶ Muratov, “Effekt Vozdeistviia,” 29.

⁴⁷ Georgii Kuznetsov, “Vstrechajutsia telepersonazhi,” *Zhurnalist* No. 6 (June, 1969): 32-33.

[*partiinaia ubezhdennost'*]. In a word, the journalist on screen is a senior [*otvetstvennyi*] Party propaganda worker.⁴⁸

Improving television portraiture

Television journalists and producers calling for an enhanced role for themselves on Soviet news programs faced an important obstacle—since the early 1960s, but with greater force after 1964, the Central Committee had made it clear that it expected television, including television news, to feature model persons drawn from the working classes, not just journalists and their cultural celebrity friends.⁴⁹ A journalist's place on camera could not be justified without reference to his ability to create effective portraits of model citizens and avoid overshadowing them with his own charismatic presence.

The result was a series of proposals for improving Soviet news that emphasized the centrality of journalists in creating effective portraits of working people. Portraiture had been an unusually prominent genre in the Soviet press since the First Five-Year Plan, but the genre had undergone a particular renaissance during the Thaw.⁵⁰ Yet these portraits were one of the most problematic parts of the news broadcast, not least because, unlike film, painting, or literature, television had to represent the Soviet man of the future using actual workers, few of whom were comfortable appearing on television. For this reason, television portraits of workers suffered, far more than appearances by artistic celebrities and polar explorers, from a troubling monotony. “Why are so many news broadcasts surprisingly similar to one another,” Central Television’s chief editor of programming asked in a 1967 article in *Zhurnalist*. “Why does a piece about leading workers in a factory in Gorkii resemble one about a Moscow factory? The same equipment, with the same workers standing around it. Everything’s from life, everything’s fairly represented. It’s just boring.”⁵¹ One possible locus for blame was the journalist producing the piece—he or she had failed to bring out the subject’s inner qualities, or lacked a sufficiently committed viewpoint to infuse the piece with meaning. A piece “without its own unique view of the world cannot attract the viewer,” Bogomolov added, and went on argue that only journalists with such a viewpoint should be allowed to lead reports on model laborers.⁵² Yet the process by which this transferring of meaning from the journalist’s Party-minded commitment to the subject of the interview-portrait should occur remained unclear.

In 1967, L. Dmitriev, one of Central Television’s expert journalist commentators, described in great depth the kind of program that he and others envisioned, one that would combine a journalist and a hero on screen in a kind of news that could move

⁴⁸ Kuznetsov, 33.

⁴⁹ In one typical intervention in 1966, Central Television’s leadership criticized *News Relay* and *Television News* for lacking “memorable images of Soviet laborers.” *Rezoliutsiia partiinogo aktiva Tsentral’nogo televideniya 28 iiulia 1966 goda*,” TsAOPIM f. 2930 op. 1 d. 384 l. 86.

⁵⁰ See Wolfe, 2, 33-36. The genre is defined, crucially for Soviet socialism, by its representation not only of an individual, but of that individual’s relationship to society.

⁵¹ Anatolii Bogomolov, “Novost’ prikhodit k vam: posle vsesoiuznoi konferentsii po radio- i teleinformatsii,” *Zhurnalist* No. 1 (January, 1967), 47.

⁵² Ibid.

viewers very deeply.⁵³ “Why,” he began, “do we invite people onto the television screen alone or in groups?...at present, the person on screen is mostly used in order to give the viewer firsthand information about a new advance in production, a new invention, a new movie.” Although news would remain television’s “number one task,” what was needed was to “go a step further and...bring the viewer not news via a person, but that person himself [*ne informatsiia cherez cheloveka, a samogo cheloveka*].” “Why,” Dmitriev asked, “does it always move us when we see a vivid individual on the screen, speaking not for someone else, but for himself, laying out his views and expressing his feelings? Why do we, as in art photography, see the transformation of a specific person into a generalized artistic image?” The reason, he explained, is that when we watch television we dream of finding “our moral ideals, those ‘positive heroes’...that were not invented by anyone.” When television viewers, Dmitriev wrote, “see a person on screen in a moment of complete moral self-revelation [*samoraskrytiie*], we experience aesthetic pleasure like that of the best films or plays.” What is more, Dmitriev argued, television drew viewers into the process, training them to experience their own lives aesthetically, as at least partial realizations of an ideal. By “comparing the facts of life seen on screen with one’s own experience of life, we seek in them a grain of the typical, and from there lies a direct road to a moving encounter [*trepetsnaya vstrecha*] with art.”⁵⁴

That moving encounter, moreover, made possible a profound influence over viewers. Dmitriev described his own viewing experience, when the process he had described was successful, as one of total conquest.

He is completely true [*on ves’—sploshnaia pravda*]. In how he lives, how he thinks, how he speaks to me from the screen.” [Remarkably, Dmitriev referred thus far to the journalist on screen, not the model worker]. “He tells me about the fates of those people with whom life has brought him together, and I see them too. The television camera looks into their lives, without changing anything....And here begins that secretive thing, which I always try to capture and which always slips away. Suddenly the narrator disappears, and the heroes, and I just see a piece of life, concentrated, but at the same time entirely factual...

Their voices, thoughts, the music, the emotional mood of the program all combined, Dmitriev continued, until

I am no longer able to judge how they are doing it, the critic in me dies, I become a naïve viewer, glued to the screen as if dead, and only a little later, when the program is over, can I return to the question: how did they do that, anyway?⁵⁵

Dmitriev’s account is descriptive—he had no clear proposals for how, precisely, to ensure that all worker portraits in a news program could have a similar effect on viewers. His account posed obvious problems, however, for a news program that sought to be

⁵³ L. Dmitriev, “Dokumental’noe iskusstvo. IV. Chelovek televideniiia,” *Sovetskoe radio i televideenie*, No. 8 (August, 1967): 19-21. Dmitriev’s article was the fourth in a year-long series on the theme of “Man and television” in the journal.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 20.

rapid, laconic, and saturated: like the intimate conversations between journalist and viewer on *News Relay*, the kind of viewing experience Dmitriev described could not be realized in a 30 second news item.

The long-awaited arrival of a new Soviet news program that sought to realize at least some of these ideas did not, of course, bring an end to these debates. The new program began to be criticized almost as soon as it aired, for the positions it took in relation to these often conflicting desiderata for Soviet news: speed and dynamism, clarity and unified presentation of evidence that the Party's view of the world was the true one, and compelling images of Soviet man.

Program "Time"

The launch of a new Soviet evening news program on January 1, 1968 was accompanied by fanfare befitting the central place that Central Television executives hoped it would find in Soviet audiences' evenings at home. Much longer than *Television News* and much shorter than *News Relay*, *Vremia* was Central Television's new premier program, intended to attract the broadest possible audience—its 45 minute broadcast on Mondays through Thursdays and half an hour on Saturdays began, in this first year, at 8:30 pm, a prime spot in the new schedule day.⁵⁶ In some ways, the program was familiar. Like *Television News*, each broadcast began with news of the comings, goings, and other doings of the country's highest Party and State officials; unlike either *Television News* or *News Relay*, however, *Vremia* was packed with very short news items. To take one example, the broadcast of *Vremia* from February 21, 1968 was made up of 42 items, organized into the following groups:

1-minute report on Brezhnev's departure for Czechoslovakia

1-minute report on preparations for a meeting in Bucharest

Block of mostly very brief items (20-30 seconds) of "important domestic news," all related to preparations for and celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Soviet Armed Forces. This section also included a two minute live report from Leningrad, broken into three intertwined mini-reports on a meeting of former soldiers, the awarding of medals to them, and the placing of wreaths on monuments to the fallen.

Block of important foreign news, all related to "the fighting in Southern Vietnam and the protest of world civil society against American aggression."

Another block of very brief items of domestic news (including a two minute live report from Donetsk on agricultural work and a one minute report from Gomel' about the discovery of oil near the city)

Brief foreign news items

News from the world of culture

Sports news

Weather forecast⁵⁷

⁵⁶ See Chapter 2 of this dissertation for a discussion of the place of *Vremia* in Central Television's new schedule in 1967-68.

⁵⁷ N. Ivanovskaia, "O programme "Vremia"," *Sovetskoe radio i televideenie*, No. 5 (May, 1968): 30-33, 31.

Vremia thus represented a radical change to the aesthetics of Soviet television news. The most notable difference was the length of most reports—most information in the show's early months was delivered in extremely terse segments between 15 and 30 seconds in length, much of which was taken up by silent film, video, or photographic illustrations, accompanied by music. Not only was information delivered rapid-fire and primarily visually, but the unifying presence of the onscreen newsreader was gone, replaced by only a newsreader voiceover narrating news items illustrated by photo and video material, of which *Vremia* featured much more than its predecessors—as much as three quarters of its reports were illustrated by video, according to one reviewer. One item in February, 1968, consisted of a voiceover announcing “The Moscow Polar Bears Club has opened its season,” followed by 10 seconds of video of the swimmers set to music.⁵⁸ Journalists were not absent from the new program, but they did not enjoy the prominent, unifying role played by Fokin on *Estafeta novostei*. Instead, they appeared only in conjunction with recurring rubrics. These rubrics and their hosts sought to engage viewers directly, via letters read on air (“Our mail”); investigations of local corruption, often reported by viewers (“TV investigation” and “Warning siren”); the personal perspective of a journalist returning from events at home or abroad (“A correspondent returns to the studio”); or popular topics, like health news (“5 minutes with Hippocrates”).⁵⁹ Gone too were the careful and explicit transitions between kinds of visual material. Like its predecessors, but with much greater frequency, *Vremia* featured segments broadcast live from studios elsewhere in the Soviet Union, a significant technological feat, and one that was highly valued by aficionados of television’s immediacy and power to virtually transport viewers. For the first time, however, these segments were simply prefaced by an image of the city with its name, rather than an explanatory verbal announcement by the newsreader. They were also far more frequent than those featured in *Televizionnye novosti* had been: Central Television’s network in 1968 included 50 cities, and each broadcast included one- to two-minute live reports from four or five different cities.⁶⁰

All of these changes were meant to capitalize on television’s advantage over radio, exploit its compelling visual form, and present a reflection of Soviet life that was “dynamic” and “saturated.”⁶¹ The effect for many viewers, however, was disorientation. People wrote in to complain that the program was incomprehensible at its current speed. As one N. Glagolev from Yaroslavl’ observed, “The general approach isn’t bad. But it’s important to avoid the current incredible kaleidoscope of reports, which prevents [the viewer from] concentrating—you need less, but better-delivered news.”⁶² Even more numerous were complaints about *Vremia*’s sign-on. Designed to convey the immediacy with which news was passed from wire service to Soviet viewers, the opening sequence featured the sound of the tele-type machines in the background and a jazzy musical sign-on, which viewers complained drowned out the voices of the newsreaders.⁶³

⁵⁸ Ibid., 31.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 32-33.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² “Obzory pisem telezritelei za ianvar’, fevral’, aprel’-sentiabr’, noiabr’, dekabr’ 1968,” GARF f. 6903 op. 10 d. 80 l. 35

⁶³ A report on viewer letters received in February, 1968 mentioned that “every author touching on the question of *Vremia*’s format asked that we change the sign-on...by cutting or softening the music and

Critics agreed that the experience of watching *Vremia* was too chaotic, and they too used the image of a kaleidoscope to characterize the confusion engendered by watching *Vremia*.⁶⁴ *Vremia* was intended to remedy the problem of falling behind the foreign radio news broadcasts, satisfying the ostensible demands of Soviet viewers with a large amount of factual information packed into a short broadcast. Yet this objective was not supposed to supersede the larger objective of ensuring that Soviet news clearly reflected an underlying narrative about the superiority of the Soviet system. Moreover, in its early months the program also departed from the prescribed hierarchy of news categories. One early broadcast came under immediate criticism from the Central Committee for failing to place items in the broadcast in an order that conveyed their relative importance. The head of the Central Committee section on Radio and Television, Pavel Moskovskii, attended a Television and Radio Committee Party conference in January 1968 in order to reprimand *Vremia*'s producers. "On January 8," he charged "you reported on the arrival of the French [Foreign] Minister Debré, on dried strawberries, on an incubator for fish, and on a trip to Cairo by a delegation led by Comrade Mazurov. Reported on them, that is, in exactly that order."⁶⁵ Writing in *Soviet Radio and Television*, another critic observed that the arrangement of news items within a given broadcast "often appears chaotic, undisciplined [*nestroinyi*]." "For the moment," she continued "it seems that *Vremia* does not live up to its founding principles: its dynamism sometimes turns into superficiality, covering many themes becomes irreconcilable with depth, and as for interest, it's hard to find in the mass of similar news items."⁶⁶ Many news stories, she pointed out, seemed to have been only included "to fill a vacuum," not for their larger contribution to the meaning of the broadcast as a whole. Speeding up the delivery of news, in imitation of Western radio and television news programs, had not succeeded in overcoming the problem of slow and boring domestic news; instead, extreme brevity had sacrificed depth of impact, and produced news stories that were not only confusing, but also indistinguishable from one another.

The program's response to these criticisms was put off by a major item of national and international news, the August, 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia. The year and a half after the invasion were a time of upheaval at Central Television. The larger impact of the transformations in Soviet politics and media after 1968 was, however, only to increase the importance of television news, and thus raise the stakes in the debate about how to improve *Vremia*'s domestic news.

The Ministry of Television: the rise of television news after 1968

August 1968 led to a sharp change in *Vremia*'s format and contents, one that is most evident in documents recording efforts, just half a year later, to restore the positive features that had been lost and improve it further. The implementation of rigid controls after the invasion stripped *Vremia* of the internal diversity of its content—gone were the program's original "rubrics" that had focused on particular kinds of content.⁶⁷ Gone too

knocking of the teletype machines." GARF f. 6903 op. 10 d. 80 ll. 33-34.

⁶⁴ Ibid 31; Boris Iakovlev, "Eshche raz o "Vremeni," *Zhurnalist* No. 2 (February, 1969): 27-28, 28.

⁶⁵ "Stenogramma piatoi otchetno-vybornoi partiinoi konferentsii komiteta po radioveshchaniu i televideniiu pri sovete ministrov SSSR," TsAOPIM f. 2930 op. 1 d. 700 l. 69.

⁶⁶ Ivanovskaia, 33.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 32.

were the journalists who had hosted these rubrics. For almost a year after the crisis, producers in the new desk complained, *Vremia* looked much like its much-maligned predecessor and subordinate, *Television News*.⁶⁸

After the short-term crackdown had passed, however, the worsening of Cold War tensions only increased *Vremia*'s importance to the state and within the Soviet media. And when the arrival of the new Nixon administration in 1969 brought the beginnings of a thaw in U.S.-Soviet relations, this too served to enhance *Vremia*'s importance as a soft medium for propaganda in an era of relatively greater openness and exposure of Soviet audiences to news and images from abroad. Already in October 1968 Central Television revised the Channel 1 schedule to include more news programming, including a new Sunday broadcast of *Vremia*.⁶⁹

By 1970, the editors of *Zhurnalist* (who included high-ranking Party officials and members of the State Committee on Television and Radio Broadcasting) and Central Television executives had reaffirmed the program's preeminent place on Central Television, but also, for the first time, among *all* Soviet media. This was new—in an article on *Vremia* in the spring of 1968, N. Ivanovskaia had identified the program's goal as introducing viewers to facts solely in order to spur their interest and motivate them to learn more from other sources, particularly newspapers or the radio. These media, she explained, were better equipped to deliver more details or commentary about an event, “not only to report facts, but to explain their meaning.”⁷⁰ This reiterated the longstanding view among Party officials and even executives at Central Television that too much television watching was undesirable, and that television was best used to attract viewer interest and draw them toward print journalism and radio.⁷¹

By contrast, in 1970, Central Television's leadership, under the direction of a powerful new Chairman of the State Committee, Sergei Lapin, began to assert that *Vremia* should become a self-sufficient news source, one that would deliver news before the newspapers—a dramatic change of policy—and contain both facts and interpretation. In a June Party meeting for the news desk, the Chief Editor for news, N. Biriukov, set out the new agenda. “*Vremia* should contain all of the most important news of today, using all of the sources available to us. A person, listening to our program, should not experience ‘information deprivation’ and have to turn on *Maiak* [the Soviet radio station featuring news and musical programming], or read the newspaper the next day.”⁷² In November of the same year, Biriukov, though he had already been replaced as Chief of the News Desk, published an article in *Televidenie i radioveshchanie* [formerly *Sovetskoe radio i televidenie*] that made public *Vremia*'s new position among other news media: *Vremia*, he announced, “must contain a summary of all political information of the day, including material that the papers publish only the following day.”⁷³ In this respect at

⁶⁸ “Protokol #1 obshchego partiinogo sobraniia Glav red info ot 28 Okt 1969.TsAOPIM” f. 2930 op. 1 d. 911 l. 104.

⁶⁹ “Poisnitel'naia zapiska k setkam 1-IV programm TsT SSSR na 1969-70 gg.,” GARF f. 6903 op. 1 d. 973, l. 241.

⁷⁰ Ivanovskaia, “O programme ‘Vremia,’” 31.

⁷¹ Kristin Roth-Ey, “Finding a Home for Television,” 295-300. See Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

⁷² TsAOPIM f. 2930 op. 1 d. 1105 l. 38-39.

⁷³ N. Biriukov, “Teleinformatsiia. Nastoiaishchee i budushchee,” *Televidenie i radioveshchanie* No. 11 (November, 1970), 10.

least, *Vremia* had eclipsed *Pravda* as the state's premier medium for informing the Soviet public.

Vremia's rise was buoyed by the ascendance of television as a whole in 1968-70. Just months after *Vremia*'s first broadcast, a draft proposal calling for the promotion of Gosteleradio to the level of an All-Union Ministry was put forward for signature by the heads of the two divisions of the Central Committee *apparat* with responsibility for television, V. Stepakov (Propaganda division) and K. Simonov (Communications and Transportation division).⁷⁴ The proposal to create a "Ministry of Television and Radio" was not carried forward after the August invasion of Czechoslovakia, perhaps partly because both Stepakov and Moskovskii lost their positions in the Central Committee *apparat* in the firings of high-ranking ideological workers that followed the crisis.⁷⁵ Television and radio remained a "State Committee," but it became one that was "of" [genitive case] rather than "subordinate to" [pri] the Soviet of Ministers.⁷⁶ This apparently subtle change of bureaucratic grammar is described by former television workers as highly significant, a change which brought the State Committee to a status directly equivalent to an all-Union ministry.⁷⁷ Finally, although he did not hold the title of Minister, the new Chair, Sergei Lapin, was an enormously powerful figure, a member of the Central Committee and ally of post-1964 chief ideologist and Politburo member Mikhail Suslov.

The arrival of Lapin

Lapin's long reign at Central Television, from 1970 to 1985, has not been remembered as a time of innovation or the active search for improvement in the quality of news programming. Among Lapin's first acts upon arriving at Central Television in April of 1970 was to concentrate the News Desk's resources on *Vremia* and send a message to critics who had grown more vocal during the two years of administrative tumult within Central Television. *News Relay* and another week-in-review program, *Seven days*, were canceled; *News Relay*'s prominent host, Yuri Fokin, was banned from appearing on television.⁷⁸

Lapin made clear that under his leadership journalists would not be the camera's primary subjects—that role belonged to model workers and other featured individuals.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ "O sereznykh nedostatkakh v rabote Tsentral'nogo televideniia i merakh po dal'neishemu razvitiu televideniia v SSSR," first draft April 16, 1968, RGANI f. 5 op. 60 d. 28 ll. 23-30.

⁷⁵ In the mid-1970s, Lapin reminded television workers that part of the reason they had not become a Ministry was that Mikhail Suslov had insisted television and radio retain a journalistic organization into content desks [*glavnye redaktsii*], rather than an administrative one with directorates [*upravleniiia*].

⁷⁶ In Russian "*Gosudarstvennyi komitet...pri Sovete ministrov*" vs. "*Gosudarstvennyi komitet Soveta ministrov.*"

⁷⁷ Genrik Yushkevichush, interview with author, Moscow, February 2007.

⁷⁸ This change is mentioned in an annual report by Central Television's letter division in 1970. See GARF f. 6903 op. 10 d. 101 l. 5.

⁷⁹ Lapin's approach to on-air personnel was not entirely negative, but his praise was directed primarily toward newsreaders and hosts of non-news programs. In one 1972 article, Lapin praised "our best newsreaders, our anchormen [*vedushchie*]" and mentioned only the most prominent newsreaders—Valentina Leont'eva, Anna Shilova, Igor Kirillov—by name. He stressed the way that these television professionals embodied the state. "Many of them have become, we might say, the people's favorites," Lapin began. Appearing on screen, he continued, they "personify our capital...[and] are sometimes taken

In 1972, Lapin published an article in *Zhurnalist* criticizing journalists appearing on air for asking banal, formulaic questions, not exploring the workers' other interests and emotional life: for seeming to believe they had nothing to learn from the workers they interviewed.⁸⁰ The article also made threatening reference to Fokin's removal from the air. "At Central Television," Lapin warned, "we are forced to exclude from programs one very eminent and popular commentator, who, in any circumstances, presents himself on camera with so much aplomb, such self-confidence, as if he himself were the chief hero of our times, while the worker, who's present for all this, is supposed to just cast this person in higher relief."⁸¹

Instead, as Lapin had stressed at internal party meetings since June, 1970, what were needed were fewer flattering portraits of actors and musicians aping Western modes and more portraits of the Soviet Union's "real heroes, those who create material wealth, those who feed, dress, shoe, and arm the country."⁸² "Yes, friends," Lapin wryly observed, "there was a time when the most famous Soviet actors could envy the fame of Pasha Angelina and Maria Demchenko. Somehow," though, "our radio and print have forgotten how to create fame for the best people in the country."⁸³

Other changes made clear that Lapin intended to bring *Vremia*'s domestic news into very close coordination with the domestic priorities of the Central Committee. Although Central Television had long coordinated its content with Central Committee initiatives following the CC's plenary sessions, or in support of official campaigns on one topic or another, Lapin took this coordination further, directly tying *Vremia*'s contents to Central Committee documents. In a meeting of Central Television and All-Union Radio's Party activists, called to discuss the Central Committee's July Plenary meeting, Lapin praised Central Television and local television and radio stations for immediately responding to the CC's resolutions on improving agriculture. "Now in every broadcast of [radio's] *Latest News*, *Television News*, and in every broadcast of *Vremia*," Lapin told the audience, "you can hear information and see footage devoted to agriculture, especially to the harvest."⁸⁴

Yet many of the changes that took place during Lapin's first years as the head of Soviet Television and Radio were strikingly familiar. Faced by the same dilemma as his

for the Kremlin's trusted envoys [*doverennye liudi Kremlia*], their voices symbolize the voices of our motherland." TsAOPIM f. 2930 op. 1 d. 1096 l. 45.

⁸⁰ Sergei Lapin, "Tribuna liudei truda," *Zhurnalist* No. 5 (May, 1972), 14-16.

⁸¹ Ibid. 14. This line of attack on journalists "pushing themselves forward" in programs featuring model workers were not new—Central Television executives had been criticizing journalists in these terms with growing frequency in the late 1960s. "How many reports do we see," Central Television's Director of programs A. Bogomolov asked in his 1967 article after the Conference on Problems of News, "where the main character is the reporter himself?" Anatolii Bogomolov, "Novost' prikhodit k vam: posle vsesoiznnoi konferentsii po radio- i teleinformatsii," *Zhurnalist* No. 1 (January, 1967), 47. Central Television employees and TV critics who advocated for more authoritative journalists in news programming often struck a defensive tone. As Georgii Kuznetsov wrote in his 1969 article in *Zhurnalist*, "lately the accusations have become more frequent: reporters are pushing their humble selves out into the foreground, but who are they, exactly?" Kuznetsov, "Vstrechaisa telepersonazhi," *Zhurnalist* No. 6 (June, 1969), 33.

⁸² See "Protokol #7, zasedanie partsobraniia Glavnoi Redaktsii Informatsii ot 9 iiunia 1970," in TsAOPIM f. 2930 op. 1 d. 1105 ll. 18, 38-39.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ "Doklad i stenogrammy vystuplenii v preniiakh na sobranii partiinogo aktiva ob itogakh iiul'skogo (1970g) plenuma TsK KPSS" in TsAOPIM f. 2930 op. 1 d. 1097 l. 12.

predecessors—boring and static Soviet domestic news—Lapin adopted two familiar strategies: speeding up the pace of news delivery and attempting to deepen the impact of domestic news defined as a form of portraiture. In internal meetings in June and July, 1970, Biriukov announced that the program needed to return to its original fast pace. First off, production staff needed to start making sure that the clock prominently displayed on the set was set to the right time.⁸⁵ The program's length was cut from 45 minutes to half an hour; the length of individual pieces was again cut to 1-2 minutes or less for most news items.

Still, two kinds of domestic news items of highest political importance were an exception to the rule of brevity—now even more so than they had been in 1968. One producer, Biriukov observed, was taping long speeches by Ministers—even these esteemed officials, he insisted, should not be allowed to talk for more than 4-5 minutes at a time.⁸⁶ The same was true for worker portraits. As one internal review of *Vremia* pointed out, “the fate of a worthy person should not be recounted in a hurry.”⁸⁷ Instead, what was wrong with these portraits was the way their subjects were presented. Leading workers and collective farmers were featured on the news, Lapin told one meeting of television staff, but “in a significant part of these programs,” Lapin said, “we just show machines and people around machines, or we show women with milk pails or what have you.” Often, he noted, “we don’t even find it necessary to give the names and patronymics of the people on screen.” This was both a failure of protocol and of strategy—such footage was boring. “These shots appear just as illustrations,” Lapin warned, “...and the danger of this kind of program is that they can just go in one ear and out the other [*oni mogut primel’ kat’sia*] and lose any kind of meaning.”⁸⁸ What was needed instead were portraits of leading workers that propagandized their innovative production techniques—not in a “narrowly technical” way, but in a way that would lead others to imitate them. More broadly, these portraits should “show the image of the Soviet person, his fully formed ideas, actively and consciously building communism.”⁸⁹

As with the other changes he proposed, Lapin’s emphasis on improving worker portraits fell well within the range of solutions already articulated by the mid-1960s. In order to understand why these solutions could not be fully implemented, or weren’t effective, however, we must consider why and how *Vremia* was produced.

The purpose of domestic news

As we have seen, when Central Television staff and Party officials proposed improvements to *Vremia*’s domestic content, they focused on different ways of reaching viewers from those they saw as important for foreign news. Rather than swift delivery of information (to keep pace with foreign radio broadcasts), what was important for

⁸⁵ "Protokoly partsobranii i zasedanii partbiuro pervichnykh partorganizatsii Glavnykh readaktsii Tsentral'nogo televideniya: propagandy; informatsii," TsAOPIM f. 2930 op. 1 d. 1105 l. 38-39.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ V.N. Manziura, “Tema truda v peredachakh programmy “Vremia”,” GARF f. 6903 op. 48 d. 173 l. 4.

⁸⁸ “Doklad i stenogrammy vystuplenii v preniakh na sobranii partiinogo aktiva ob itogakh iiul’skogo (1970g) plenuma TsK KPSS,” TsAOPIM f. 2930 op. 1 d. 1097 l. 21.

⁸⁹ Sergei Lapin, “Tribuna liudei truda,” *Zhurnalist* No. 5 (May, 1972), 15. Lapin discussed the problems with worker portraits in detail in a 1972 article in *Zhurnalist*, in which he sharply criticized television journalists for asking artificial questions, interviewing workers in unflattering, overwhelming settings, where loud factory noise made it impossible to hear them.

domestic news, they felt, was the creation of a profound emotional or spiritual connection between the viewer and the person on screen. This postulated viewer experience was supposed to serve a quite specific purpose: mobilizing the population, individual by individual, to recommit themselves, in a kind of conversion process, to the Soviet project, and especially to economic production.

This was true for other media as well, but television's role was uniquely focused on transforming viewers via a personal, emotional, even spiritual revelation, something that television enthusiasts and their Party supervisors alike felt television's visual and intimate form made possible. Television might, and often did, work together with other media during the 1970s in the promotion of a particular person's biography. Television's special contribution, however, was to convey the featured person's spiritual state. An article in *Zhurnalista* in 1971 described how this had worked in a recent combined effort between the newspaper *Pravda* and Central Television. An article published in *Pravda* about an Ivanovo textile worker, Zoia Pavlovna Pukhovaia, was reinforced, the same evening, by a television essay [*ocherk*] authored by the same journalist, focusing on the heroine's "spiritual state" as she moved through each aspect of her day:

Elated and dignified during an initiation ceremony for new worker graduates from the technical school; merry and carefree while cross country skiing; businesslike, together, and yet somehow elevated [*pripodniatoe*] when she calmly and lightly approaches the factory equipment and, with astonishing beauty and femininity, touches the flowing threads; satisfied, simply happy in the store when she looks at her factory's production; concerned, concentrating in the factory supervisor's office, where she has come to solve a problem at work.

This array of "moods" and "states" crossing the screen, the article's author concluded, "drew out viewers' sympathy and empathy."⁹⁰

Figuring out how to convey these emotional states in a television portrait was the subject of much discussion in *Zhurnalista* and *Sovetskoe radio i televideenie* in the early 1970s, including articles on how to bring out reticent subjects so that they would "reveal themselves," proposals about the uses of hidden cameras, and reports on local television staff who succeeded in creating programs that conveyed their subjects' inner, emotional lives.⁹¹ Texts of some shows recorded the facial expressions of their subjects—an episode of the Leningrad Television Studio's program *Gorizont* [Horizon] (which was

⁹⁰ Viktor Khelemendik, "Vtoroe otkrytie," *Zhurnalista* No. 6 (June, 1971):17.

⁹¹ See for example Dmitriev, "Dokumental'noe iskusstvo. IV. Chelovek televideeniia," 19-20. Dmitriev's proposals in this regard are written with his usual vividness. "Predpolozhim, pervaia polovina zadachi reshena--geroi naiden. Ostaetsia vtoraja, na kotoroi ne raz lomali zuby samye opytnye professionaly: kak sdelat', chtoby v studii vo vremia peredachi ne spugnut' nastroeniia, ne pomeshat' samoraskrytiiu, ne oglushit' geroia vsei nashei sumatokhoi i gvaltom, strashnymi glazami telekamer, vse obstanovkoi pered peredachei i vo vremia nee...[begin p. 20] A ne logichnee li i ne proshche li voobshche ustranit' etu obstanovku? Davaite vynesem nashu "kukhniu" za predely pavil'ona. Davaite spriachem vse mikrofony...Pust' eto budet udobnaia i uiutnaia komnata, gde za stenkami budut spriachany kamery na spetsial'nykh shtativakh, sposbnye zagliadyvat' v etu komnatu cherez tshchatel'no zamaskirovannye okoshechki. Pust' ne budet slepiashchego sveta--sushchestvuiut katodno-luchevye trubki, prekrasno rabotaiushchie pri obychnom osveshchenii. I pust' chelovek, okazavshiisya v etoi "studii", ne znaet, chto za kazhdym ego dvizheniem slediat minimum tri golubykh ob"ektiva, a kazhdoe slovo loviat chutkie mikrofony."

broadcast on Channel 1 in the 1970s) included descriptions of the look in the eyes of one tractor driver, Vasilii Timakin—his eyes were “attentive, and yet, at the same time, as if directed inward. This,” the stage directions continued, “is Vasilii Timakin. Hushed music plays. The voice of the newsreader, as if it were Timakin’s thoughts [begins].”⁹² These intimate, emotional portraits were meant, moreover, to help the viewer move from the specific to the general, from one model worker to all of Soviet society in its ethical and aesthetic superiority to life in the West. The ideal television portrait, another article stressed, would be “perceived as a portrait of [our] epoch.”⁹³

These “portraits of society” were intended to engage viewers, especially young viewers, in practical steps by which they could signal their sincere loyalty and commit to greater economic productivity. As Lapin announced in a 1972 article in *Zhurnalist*, “when we invite workers into the studio or film them in other surroundings...we try to show their work, their experience in life, their authority in their factory and as representatives of their country in a way that evokes in young people the desire to follow in their footsteps, to choose a working profession because it is prestigious, respectable, and exciting.”⁹⁴ Young viewers, a high-stakes audience for many reasons, not least of which was their greater interest in foreign radio broadcasts, were supposed to (and sometimes did) respond to these programs by writing, individually, to Central Television or other state organs to discuss their own conversion from disaffection to commitment, or ask how they could be transferred to a model factory or construction site that had been featured on television.⁹⁵ Portraits of model workers were often occasioned by the subject’s technical innovation, which, it was hoped, television would spread nationwide.

Not all of the programs described above were technically news programs. Although they took the form of journalistic “essays” [*ocherki*] and employed interviews and other generic features of “news,” within Central Television such programs were produced by the Propaganda desk. Yet this is precisely the point—in the case of domestic news, there was no clear distinction between content that was produced as “propaganda” and that which was produced as “news.” Vladimir Turbin, the Chief editor of literary and dramatic programs, lightly combined domestic news with all other genres of portraiture in his comments at an internal Central Television Party conference in 1974. Turbin began by noting another reason that creating programs that appealed to viewers’ emotions was important. “Our viewers are now surrounded by such a powerful stream of information,” he observed, “that it is commonly said that ‘the airwaves are open above him.’

In order to move his thinking in the necessary direction, we need to capture his heart. And in order to capture his heart, every program needs to be emotionally engaging [*emotsional’no zarazitel’na*]...Take the news. The simplest news program is a person on screen or an interview...How can it engage us? If there’s a living person on camera, if we see the process by which he

⁹² Text of *Gorizont*, April 4, 1971. GARF f. 6903 op. 26 d. 1360.

⁹³ Semen Bun’kov, “Tridtsat’ schastlivykh sluchaev,” *Zhurnalist* No. 2 (February, 1973):17-19.

⁹⁴ Sergei Lapin, “Tribuna liudei truda,” *Zhurnalist* No. 5 (May, 1972), 15.

⁹⁵ See for example letter reports in GARF f. 6903 op. 10 d. 102 l. 23-24; GARF f. 6903 op. 36 d. 1 l. 474-475. The latter mentions a case where factories and construction sites in need of large new workforces requested coverage on *Vremia* in order to attract workers.

thinks...when we start to think with him, then contact takes place, that is, emotional engagement.

From this description of how a news program, with its simple format, could engage viewers emotionally, Turbin moved on to consider the entire content of Soviet television as part of the same genre—portraiture—as this simple news program. “What if we were to count,” Turbin declared, “how many people appear before our viewers on all of our programs in a day, or a week? It is a colossal, moving portrait gallery. It is a collective portrait of our contemporaries, our people.”⁹⁶ Lapin made clear that he too viewed Central Television’s production as part of one singular project, to which news and other genres of programming were all subordinate, in a 1977 discussion of the problem of fitting all the material produced for *Vremia* into the show’s allotted time. Some of the extra reports, Lapin mused, might form the basis for future episodes of a documentary film series released in 1977 for the 60th anniversary of 1917, which covered each year of Soviet history in a separate, one hour episode. The series into which these news items might easily fit was entitled *Our biography* [*Nasha biografiia*].⁹⁷

The problem was, of course, that programs focused on creating spiritual portraits of workers provided viewers with very little of what they were looking for from news, including foreign radio broadcasts—information about current events at home and abroad. These portraits were also far from laconic, and they bore no clear connection to the particular day or even year in which they appeared. Furthermore, the mobilizing, revelatory purpose of Soviet domestic news profoundly shaped the way that news was produced within Central Television, a fact that further limited the possibilities of creating news that was eventful or dynamic in the same way as foreign news.

Producing domestic news

Like much of Soviet “authoritative discourse,” the production of Soviet domestic news texts in the 1970s had undergone what Alexei Yurchak describes as a “performative shift.”⁹⁸ Judging from the number of reprimands in Lapin’s speeches, what was important to most of the lower-level journalists, consultants, and cameramen responsible for writing and producing Soviet news texts was producing something that would meet all the parameters for a Soviet news story and thus result in the payment of the honorarium due to journalists whose news piece was produced and aired.⁹⁹ More committed to practices like illegally dividing honoraria among a team of coworkers than they were to revitalizing Soviet domestic news, many journalists produced texts in much the same way as Yurchak’s Komsomol secretaries, relying on the use of meaningless statistics and formulaic language.¹⁰⁰ Yet even when they were engaged, for one reason or another, with

⁹⁶ “Stenogramma IX otchetno-vyborochnoi partiinoi konferentsii,” TsAOPIM f. 2930 op. 2 d. 635 l. 48.

⁹⁷ “Stenogramma sobraniiia partiinogo aktiva ob itogakh oktiabr’skogo (1977) Plenuma TsK KPSS, vneocherednoi VII sessii Verkhovnogo Soveta SSSR i zadachakh partorganizatsii Goskomiteta,” TsAOPIM f. 2930 op. 3 d. 231 l. 26-27.

⁹⁸ Yurchak, 18-26

⁹⁹ See for example the lengthy 1973 report on complaints about distribution of honoraria in TsAOPIM f. 2930 op. 2 d. 446 ll. 192-159; and another 1973 discussion of corrupt honoraria practices in TsAOPIM f. 2930 op. 2 d. 433 ll. 12, 77-78, 89.

¹⁰⁰ Yurchak, 77-125. For complaints about formulaic and statistic-laden news, see TsAOPIM f. 2930 op. 1 d. 147 l. 10; TsAOPIM f. 2930 op. 2 d. 649 l. 157.

the task of creating dynamic news and effective portraits, Soviet television journalists encountered two major kinds of problems—those having to do with timeliness and those related to verisimilitude in representations of Soviet life.

First, Soviet journalists asked to represent Soviet life via heroic situations could almost never be present with their cameras to capture those situations as they unfolded. Despite its journalistic organization into content desks, like a newspaper, Soviet television was organized more like a film studio. Central Television was eternally short of mobile television equipment, and in the 1970s the use of such equipment had to be requested months in advance, something about which TV journalists continually complained. For events outside the capital, the situation was even worse. In the late 1960s, as the network of radio relay and satellite towers brought Central Television to the majority of Soviet territory, the State Television and Radio Committee drastically cut the hours during which regional television stations could broadcast their own content. Although this was a dramatic centralizing change for Soviet broadcasting, the local stations were also asked to produce more content for broadcast on Central Television, and particularly for *Vremia*.¹⁰¹ However, as we have seen, the understanding of what constituted an “event” in Soviet news tended to exclude most of what would be considered newsworthy elsewhere—disasters, political conflicts, accidents—and to focus instead on ceremonies and feats of production that were themselves the outcome of careful planning and staging. Even if a local station managed to cover an “event” in a timely way, there was no guarantee it would air promptly on Central Television: reports from particular cities for broadcast on *Vremia* were also scheduled far in advance, and limited to a certain number of hours per month.¹⁰²

The belatedness of reports from Soviet factories and farms also pushed news producers up against the limits of a strictly documentary genre: given the frequency of calls for news that would merge documentary and fiction forms, what would be the harm in a little re-staging of events that had already taken place? This practice was the focus of a critical article in *Zhurnalist*, which charged the Omsk television studio with practices like reattaching sprigs of grapes to the vine in order to videotape Pioneer scouts harvesting them, an event which had taken place before the crew arrived.¹⁰³

Staging events risked undermining television’s credibility—not necessarily for viewers, but for the people who witnessed these falsifying practices at their own farm or factory. Other issues revolved around the extent to which the featured people or places fit the journalists’ (and perhaps censors’) understanding of how someone or someplace “typical,” yet exceptional, should look. Journalists in local TV studios wrote in to *Zhurnalist* with questions about how accurately they could represent life at their factories and farms. Was it appropriate, for example, to show manual labor, or should work appear only “attractive and beautiful”? The article’s author, a prominent producer in the

¹⁰¹ Accomplishing this was highly problematic, and Central Television continually faced obstacles in getting the local studios to curtail their own broadcasts, broadcast Central Television’s First Channel in full, etc. See for example GARF f. 6903 op. 1 d. 1012 ll. 272-279; GARF f. 6903 op. 32 d. 14 l. 6.

¹⁰² For a 1973 description of how this planning process worked, see GARF f. 6903 op. 32 d. 257 l. 49. For complaints about the inability to get a mobile television station at Central Television without a month’s notice, see Georgii Kuznetsov, “Vstrechajutsia telepersonazhi,” *Sovetskoe radio i televideenie* No. 6 (June, 1969), 32.

¹⁰³ V.M. Vil’chek, “Ostrozho: liudi!,” *Zhurnalist* No. 9 (September, 1972): 34-36.

Central Television Propaganda desk, responded that what mattered most were the “moral values” that a worker could convey, whether he worked with a pitchfork or a tractor.¹⁰⁴

Certain kinds of accurate reflection of Soviet life were clearly off limits, however, during Lapin’s first years at Central Television. From the early 1970s until 1979, the prohibition on negative portrayals of Soviet life extended to exposés of local corruption and mismanagement as well, something that had been an intermittent feature of *Vremia* prior to Lapin’s arrival; the critical pieces were initially justified partly in terms of verisimilitude—viewers would see reflected on screen their own problems and concerns.¹⁰⁵ Critical news pieces would also help resolve such situations, by exposing the perpetrators.¹⁰⁶ In 1970, Lapin made clear that no negative representations of Soviet life were acceptable, given Central Television’s national reach (and international audience). “There is no reason for radio and television to get carried away with critical statements, criticisms of particular factories or even branches of industry, [before an audience of]...millions of people,” Lapin told a Party meeting in June, 1970. Of course, he added, we shouldn’t hide problems, or embellish the truth, but, he insisted, “our fundamental task is, after all, to promote positive facts, spread new ways of life and labor to the masses, glorify the work of Soviet people.”¹⁰⁷ Local conflicts, Lapin’s deputy Enver Mamedov explained later, could be resolved locally, without national publicity.¹⁰⁸

As Lapin’s and Mamedov’s statements in the early 1970s made clear, conflict and unpredictability did not belong on Soviet domestic news. These were the two elements essential to most foreign news, a category of programming that was expanding rapidly in the Soviet television schedule of the 1970s and 80s.

The rise of foreign news

Lapin’s cancelation of *News Relay* in 1970 had left Central Television’s News Desk with only a couple of foreign news programs, which appeared only rarely and functioned less as news than as overt counterpropaganda. They had tendentious titles; one program on the United States was entitled *Rulers Unmasked [Vladyki bez maskov]*. From the mid-1970s on, however, coverage of foreign news expanded dramatically—by 1976 there were four new programs that dealt exclusively with foreign news.¹⁰⁹ In addition to these four new programs, international news was granted as many as four additional slots in the monthly television schedule for programs responding promptly to international events as they developed.¹¹⁰ In November, 1978, in a speech to a Plenum of

¹⁰⁴ See Georgii Kuznetsov, “K voprosu o vilakh,” *Zhurnalist* No. 3 (March, 1975): 61-62.

¹⁰⁵ N. Ivanovskaia, “O programme ‘Vremia,’” 32.

¹⁰⁶ See Biriukov’s comments to this effect in GARF f. 6903 op. 1 d. 905 l. 12.

¹⁰⁷ “Stenogrammy sobranii partiynykh aktivov o gotovnosti partiinoi organizatsii sluzhb Komiteta k provedeniiu veshchaniia, sviashchennogo 100-letiiu so dnia rozhdeniiia V.I. Lenina,” TsAOPIM f. 2930 op. 1 d. 1096 l. 34.

¹⁰⁸ “Doklad i rezoliutsiiia partsobraniia pervichnoi partrorganizatsii Tsentral’nogo televideiniia “O zadachakh partorganizatsii TsT po propagande reshenii i dokumentov XXIV s”ezda KPSS,” TsAOPIM f. 2930 op. 2 d. 13 ll. 14-15.

¹⁰⁹ These programs were “Mezhdunarodnaia panorama” (30 min, 4 times a month), “Beseda na mezhdunarodnye temy politicheskogo obozrevatel’ia gazety “Pravda” Iu.A. Zhukova” (30 min. 2 times a month), “Sodruzhestvo” (30 min. 2 times a month), and “Sovetskii soiuz glazami zarubezhnykh gostei” 15 min. 2 times a month). See GARF f. 6903 op. 32 d. 625 l. 6. For a detailed comparision of Soviet and American foreign news in the mid 1980s, see Ellen Mickiewicz, *Split Signals*, 85-123.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

the Central Committee, Brezhnev directly addressed the problem of Western radio broadcasting and called for a dramatic increase in coverage of international news on Soviet television and radio. Central Television responded, beginning the following month, with a rapid and marked expansion of foreign news programming. The extremely popular and lively program *International panorama* [*Mezhdunarodnaia panorama*] was expanded from 30 to 45 minutes with a likely expansion to an hour; on *Vremia* the length of the foreign news segment was increased, as was the frequency of appearances on the show by foreign affairs experts and journalists as commentators on international news topics.

Most remarkably, for the first time the two evening broadcasts of *Television News* (now called simply “*News*”) on weekdays were replaced entirely by a new foreign news program, *Today in the world* [*Segodnia v mire*].¹¹¹ *News* had framed the peak evening viewing hours, with broadcasts at 6 pm and after the last program of the evening. The new foreign news program would now occupy this prime spot every weekday evening; with *International panorama* in a prime spot on Sundays and an episode of one of two foreign affairs shows or a topical film on foreign news on Saturdays, Soviet television would now feature a substantial amount of foreign news during a peak viewing time every day of the week. In an internal Party meeting briefing his staff, Lapin directly linked these changes to the threat of Western radio broadcasting. The late night broadcast of *Today in the world* was intended, he explained, to counteract the enemy radio broadcasts “that are most active during that time, and [to] put forward our own summary of the political events of the day.”¹¹²

Lapin also referred to another remarkable feature of these expanded foreign news programs: they were exclusively led by expert commentators, not newsreaders. Central Television in 1978 had ten such persons on their payroll, nearly all of whom were journalists, mainly foreign correspondents or commentators for Soviet newspapers or wire services.¹¹³ The essential role played by authoritative journalists on the shows was described in the press. In an article on the new program *Today in the world*, one of the group of six foreign affairs observers who hosted the show, Farid Seiful'-Muliukov, described the “danger,” when hosting a news program, of being turned into “just a reader” of information. He remarked, however, that the program’s six commentator-hosts had “noticed and overcome” this risk. They tried, he continued, to deliver all news in an “emotionally vivid way, revealing our relationship to the event, commenting on it from our positions as specialists and citizens, who are moved by the event about which we are talking from the television screen.” Indeed, Seiful'-Muliukov went on to describe in great detail his personal role in assembling the news for the programs he hosted and deciding both which stories to cover and their order, giving an hour by hour account of the 24 hours before a broadcast. To emphasize this individualized approach, based in his expertise, Seiful'-Muliukov also stressed the diversity of approaches taken by the program’s six different hosts, who took turns assembling and leading the program and

¹¹¹ “Stenogramma partaktiv ob itogakh noiabr’skogo (1978) Plenuma TsK KPSS i zadachakh, vytekaiushchikh iz vystuplenii na Plenume General’nogo sekretaria TsK KPSS tov. L.I. Brezhneva,” TsAOPIM f. 2930 op. 3 d. 451 l. 14-15.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 14.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*; for a list of the foreign affairs commentators and their main professions in 1976 (there were then seven), see GARF f. 6903 op. 32 d. 625 l. 15.

each had different backgrounds.¹¹⁴ This, he thought, was one element in the show's popularity; another was the fact that "everyone likes a commentator who has a deep understanding" of the underlying questions about a news story.

In effect, the ambitions of Central Television's "enthusiasts" for a prominent role for themselves as journalists-commentators on news programs had been realized, but only for foreign news. On all of Central Television's news programming, foreign news was overwhelmingly presented by expert journalists, with first-hand experience of foreign life and educational backgrounds that prepared them to add their own perspective, within the bounds of the Party's position. As such, Soviet foreign news in many ways resembled cold war television journalism in the West—in a nuclear world, complex diplomatic events took on new significance for audiences at home, and led to the emergence of the "expert" commentator, able to explain their meaning.¹¹⁵ Yet American news programs also featured experts on domestic politics; on Soviet television the position of the journalist-commentator was far more tenuous for domestic news.

In 1974, Central Television got authorization from the Central Committee to establish a small group of domestic television news commentators, but they were the object of frequent criticism for the dullness of their presentations and their failure to attract the young audiences that flocked to a program like *International panorama*.¹¹⁶ These domestic news commentators were also of markedly lower status within Central Television; one producer from the Youth and New programs desks remembers a clear hierarchy within Central Television's News Desk, in which foreign news was the most prestigious assignment, then news of science and culture, with domestic news at the bottom.¹¹⁷ Their job was also more difficult. When Soviet reporters appeared onscreen to report domestic news, they continued to be vulnerable to attack for appearing to condescend to or overshadow the people they were reporting on.¹¹⁸ Providing commentary on domestic news in a one party state was also uniquely difficult. One frequent role of news "commentators" in the West is to provide insight into and/or evaluate behind-the-scenes motives and likely outcomes of a particular political conflict. That role was, naturally, not possible for Soviet domestic news "commentators".

¹¹⁴ Farid Seiful'-Muliukov, "Segodnia v mire," *Zhurnalist* No. 9 (September, 1979): 10-11.

¹¹⁵ Thomas Doherty, *Cold War, Cool Medium: Television, McCarthyism, and American Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 85.

¹¹⁶ In 1981 they were still only three in number vs. 11 international news commentators. See RGANI f. 5 op. 84 d. 106 l. "Auditoria programm obozrevatelei Tsenral'nogo televiedeniia po voprosam vnutrennei zhizni strany. Spravka," GARF f. 6903 op. 48 d. 348 ll. 4, 21.

¹¹⁷ Eduard Sagalaev, interview with author, Moscow, March 2007.

¹¹⁸ This was a professional risk for newsreaders as well. Ninel' Shakhova, who joined *Vremia* as a reporter on cultural news in November 1971, recalls how Lapin criticized a newsreader, Ol'ga Dobrokhotova, for an interview she conducted with Leonid Utesov, the famous and, by the early 1970s, elderly Soviet jazz musician. After viciously mocking Dobrokhotova's modish hairstyle, Lapin revealed her error—she appeared on screen next to Utesov while interviewing him, instead of allowing him to be the sole focus of the camera's gaze. The interview was intended for inclusion in Central Television's archive, and her appearance next to Utesov was therefore inappropriate. As Shakhova remembers it, "Lapin was against anyone sitting next to Utesov on camera. The most important thing was him, his thoughts, his words, his memories." Shakhova, *Liudi moego "Vremeni"* (Moscow: Eksmo "Algoritm", 2004), 276-277.

Conclusion: unpredictability on Program Time

Even when international news was delivered on *Vremia* by newsreaders, reading an official statement in their famously slow, even diction, it remained far more dramatic than Soviet domestic news, for one key reason. Even the most formal, ceremonial event outside the Soviet bloc was embedded, one way or another, in a history that was non-teleological, where outcomes were unknown. The same can be said of another part of *Vremia*'s newscast each evening that was closely watched, and which now features heavily in post-Soviet nostalgia for the television of the Brezhnev era—the program's sign-on.

Central Television's repeated effort, every few years throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, to make *Vremia* as fast and "dynamic" as its Western counterparts, was reflected on the program's sign-on. The 1968 sign-on featured an image of a small satellite set against a pattern of lines that recalled the famous shape of the Shukhovskaya radio tower at Central Television's Shabolovka headquarters, out of which the News Desk had just moved. The reference to Shabolovka immediately felt dated, and around 1970 the sign-on was replaced by another still image, this time in color, with the program's name in bold letters over a drawing of the new Ostankino tower, projected over a map of the world, centered on the Eurasian continent, and surrounded by concentric circles representing the television signal reaching outward in all directions. By 1977, the sign-on had changed yet again, this time to a filmed, moving image of a satellite dish rotating slowly in all directions—an image of listening and gathering, rather than broadcasting, information. By the 1980s, the sign-on was a flashier, animated sequence, and the viewer's perspective had moved out into space, with the Kremlin's ruby star sweeping around the earth like a communications satellite as the word "*Vremia*" moved out toward the viewer.

The changes in the sign-on gave viewers a window into Central Television's and the Party's own uncertainty into how best to represent the Soviet place in the world; its changing tactics for signaling the program's meaning hinted at the existence of real conflicts and politics at the highest levels of the Party's ideological system.¹¹⁹ But these hints were all around in the late 1970s. The sports news offered an alternative way to understand the politics behind the changing sign-on—as a contest between factions that obeyed certain rules of the game, but whose outcome was unknown. The weather forecast offered another perspective on time and human history, one that was soothing in its continuity and cycles, but that was also, like the foreign news, one damn thing after another. The weather forecast was set to music—vaguely haunting music that alternated between comforting major and unsettling minor keys. These three seemingly mundane features of *Vremia* took on unusual significance because they reflected a world that was recognizable to Soviet viewers—one marked by conflict and uncertainty about the future. Their great significance in the way the program has been remembered suggests that, well before 1985, Central Television's premier news program was beginning to "reflect Soviet life" in ways unintended by the state.

¹¹⁹ As such, they were of great interest to Soviet viewers, who were very astute readers of such signals, and were the subject of thousands of viewer letters. For more on the critical viewing skills of Soviet and Russian audiences, see Ellen Mickiewicz, *Changing Channels: Television and the Struggle for Power in Russia*. 2nd ed. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 52-64.

From Café to Contest: Soviet Central Television's New Year's Shows, 1962-1982

Chapter 4

Soviet holiday celebrations were an essential medium for defining and promoting new Revolutionary and Soviet social relations and symbolic systems, for imagining the communist future and bringing it closer.¹ They were also one of the primary means by which the Communist Party sought to mobilize the Soviet population and disseminate political messages to both urban elites and non-Party, remote, and rural audiences.² By the mid 1930s, the Soviet holiday calendar structured economic production, the distribution of consumer goods, and the interactions between Soviet citizens and the state—holidays were the best time to make demands on the state for a promotion or better housing.³ Holiday symbolism and dates also powerfully shaped the content and production of Soviet media.⁴ The symbolic and economic importance of holidays was not, of course, unique to the Soviet context, but the Soviet state faced the particular dilemma of revolutionary states: having to create or elevate new holidays and co-opt or repress old ones.

Although the importance of holidays in Soviet temporal, political, and economic structures continued throughout the post-Stalin era, there has been a presumption that Soviet holidays, invented in the first years after the Revolution and reinvented under Stalin, became routinized after 1953. Studies of post-Stalin Soviet festivity have been limited in number and in scope, compared with the literature on festivity in early post-Revolutionary years and the Stalin era.⁵ They have focused primarily on public festivity, and particularly on the Brezhnev era's answer to the vibrant mass festivals of the 1920s: the interminable holiday demonstrations on Red Square that became one of the most

¹ On Soviet holidays and mass festivals in the Revolutionary, Civil War, NEP and Stalin eras see Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); James von Geldern, *Bolshevik Festivals, 1917-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Katerina Clark, *Petersburg, Crucible of Cultural Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995); Karen Petrone, *Life has Become More Joyous, Comrades: Celebrations in the Time of Stalin* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000); and Malte Rolf, *Das sowjetische Massenfest* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2006).

² Petrone, 5-7, 16-17.

³ Petrone, 16-17.

⁴ Malte Rolf, "A Hall of Mirrors: Sovietizing Culture under Stalinism," *Slavic Review* 68, 3 (2009): 602. For the history of the Soviet New Year's Film see Alyssa DeBlasio, "The New-Year film as a genre of post-war Russian cinema," *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema* 2, 1 (2008), 43-61. See also Jeffrey Brooks, *Thank You Comrade Stalin! Soviet Public Culture from Revolution to Cold War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000). Brooks does not deal extensively with the holiday organization of Soviet society, but much of his discussion of the "moral economy of the gift" in the Soviet press is based on sources published during holiday dates. See for example Brooks, 84, 89.

⁵ The only full treatment of post-Stalin Soviet ritual is Christel Lane, *The Rites of Rulers. Ritual in Industrial Society: The Soviet Case* (New York : Cambridge University Press, 1981). Other works focus primarily on public festivities and the ceremonial of the political elite. See also Christopher Binns, "The Changing Face of Power: Revolution and Accommodation in the Soviet Ceremonial System," Part I, *Man*, New Series 14, 4 (1979) 585-606; and Part II, *Man*, New Series 15, 1 (1980): 170-187. Nina Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives: The Lenin Cult in Soviet Russia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983) and *The Living and the Dead: The Rise and the Fall of the Cult of World War II in Russia* (New York: Basic Books, 1994). See also Malte Rolf, *Das sowjetische Massenfest* and Vladimir Glebkin, *Ritual v sovetskoi kulture* (Moscow: Janus-K, 1998).

important symbols of the “stagnation” account of the Brezhnev era.⁶ These parades have been seen as exemplifying the way that late Soviet public or “official” culture had aged along with the state’s leadership, becoming hopelessly rigid, hierarchical, and formalized, preparing the way for the collapse of Soviet ideology in 1991.⁷

This chapter will consider a different, and far more lively, set of post-Stalin holiday rituals, those that took place not on public squares, but in a new ceremonial space between public and private—on television.⁸ These television holiday rituals differed from the demonstrations on Red Square: they were intended to entertain viewers, and their essential content was popular music and humor.⁹ Far from being closed, formalized, and entirely predictable, they were unpredictable, controversial, and subject to significant

⁶ The stagnation account of late Soviet cultural life is already something of a straw man. For two excellent deconstructions of “stagnation” and its historical origins, see Mark Sandle “A Triumph of Ideological Hairdressing? Intellectual Life in the Brezhnev Era Reconsidered,” in *Brezhnev Reconsidered*, eds. Edwin Bacon and Mark Sandle (New York: Palgrave McMillan, 2002): 135-185, and Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 4-8.

⁷ Lane gives us a sense of how these events have been remembered. “The general impression of unimaginative uniformity was further reinforced by the prevalence of canned music,” she recalled of the 60th anniversary of 1917 parade she watched in November 1977. “The street decorations, too, were standardized and uninspiring.” *The Rites of Rulers*, 185-187. The parades also play an important part in Yurchak’s critique of the “stagnation” account of late socialism, as an example of the formalized rituals whose performative dimension, he argues, grew in importance relative to their constative meanings, such that their performative reproduction “enabled the emergence of diverse, multiple, and unpredictable meanings in everyday life.” *Everything was Forever*, 15, 25. Notably, both Lane and Yurchak focus on first-person accounts of the parades, rather than the much more common experience of watching them on television.

⁸ There is a rich literature on the ways that the arrival of television transformed the private spaces of the home in the United States. See for example Karal Ann Marling, *As Seen on TV: The Visual Culture of Everyday Life in the 1950s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994) and Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

In taking these television holiday programs seriously, I am following Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz, who have defended the study of festive television and “media events,” suggesting that they are more than hegemonic manipulations or evidence of an aestheticization of politics that can only lead in one direction. Dayan and Katz, *Media Events. The Live Broadcasting of History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), vii-xi. See also Richard Stites’ eloquent defense of the study of popular culture in Richard Stites, *Russian Popular Culture: entertainment and society since 1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 1-2. The most important English language works on television in the Soviet Union are Ellen Mickiewicz, *Media and the Russian Public* (New York: Praeger, 1981) and *Split Signals. Television and Politics in the Soviet Union* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); and Kristin Roth-Ey, “Mass Media and the Re-Making of Soviet Culture, 1950s-1960s,” (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 2003). See also Vladislav Zubok, *Zhivago’s Children: the Last Russian Intelligentsia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 149-154.

⁹ The Soviet parades on Red Square have played a constituent role in typologies of modern ritual. See for example Don Handelman, *Models and Mirrors: towards an anthropology of public events* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 23-44. For Handelman the late Soviet parades on Red Square epitomize what he calls “events that present”—rituals that lack internal contradictions and therefore any internal mechanism for change. I would like to suggest that the Soviet television holiday programs discussed here are closer to Handelman’s other category of public event, “events that model,” which reflect society in microcosm, are purposive, preview “a hypothetical future condition that will be brought into being,” and include “incompatible, contradictory, or conflicting states of existence, and in the course of its working it must overcome, synthesize, or otherwise solve.” Handelman, 28, 30.

change over time, not least because their producers were still deciding how to stage them. Rather than offering a display of state power and reflecting a strict social hierarchy, they sought to delight viewers, creating a “good mood” for the holidays.¹⁰ These shows were also far more representative of Soviet holiday television than the parades on Red Square. The live broadcasts of the May 1 and November 7 parades were preceded and followed by hours of popular entertainment, including films, plays, championship soccer and hockey matches, reviews of the year in figure skating, humorous sketches, made-for-television movies, and especially concerts.¹¹ By 1971, a group of five major state holidays (March 8, May 1, May 9, November 7, and December 31-January 1) plus Party Congresses and Central Committee Plenums were each accompanied by special entertainment programming that lasted for at least two and as many as ten days; lesser holidays, like the days of various professions, were marked by evening concert programs. Even smaller, non-calendrical festive occasions, such as the visit of a foreign leader, were reflected by special entertainments in the television schedule.¹²

The television holiday shows considered here, *Little Blue Flame* [*Goluboi ogonek*] (1962-present) and *Song of the Year* [*Pesnia goda*] (1971-present), stood out from this general background of the festively organized Soviet television schedule. They were special occasions in their own right, explicitly prepared for and anticipated by Central Television and TV viewers long in advance of their broadcasts. They offered their own rituals and liminal moments, and presented a fully realized alternative to the representation of Soviet society provided by the Red Square demonstrations. They are examples of what Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz have called “diasporic ceremonies,” television holidays that translate “a monumental occasion into a multiplicity of simultaneous, similarly programmed, home-bound microevents” focused on a symbolic

¹⁰ In a 1972 Party meeting at Central Television, “affirming the mood of cheer, optimism, and energy, and facilitating the leisure [*otdykh*] of Soviet people” was named as an explicit objective of musical programming. Tsentral’nyi Arkhiv Obshchestvenno-politicheski Istorii Moskvy (TsAOPIM), f. 2930 (Partiiniy Komitet Gosudarstvennogo Komiteta Soveta Ministrov SSSR po televideniiia i radioveshchaniiia), op. 2, d. 247, l. 146 (Protokoly partsobranii i zasedanii partbiuro pervichnykh partorganizatsii Tsentral’nogo televideniiia: glavnii redaktsii literaturno-dramaticheskikh programm; Glavnii redaktsii muzykal’nykh program).

At holiday times, the need to create a “good mood” or “a holiday mood” was frequently invoked internally and in viewer letters to Central Television. See for example Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskii Federatsii (GARF) f. 6903 (Gosudarstvennyi Komitet SSSR po televideniiu i radioveshchaniiu (Gosteleradio SSSR). 1933-1991), op. 1, d. 666, l. 7 (Protokoly zasedanii obshchestvennogo soveta telezritelei pri Tsentral’noi Studii Televideniiia, 1960); GARF f. 6903, op. 32, d. 13, l. 54 (Protokol #29 zasedaniiia Gosudarstvennogo komiteta Soveta Ministrov SSSR po televideniiu i radioveshchaniiu, “O novogodnykh programmakh Tsentral’nogo Televideniiia, 1971); GARF f. 6903, op. 36, d. 11, l. 64 (Obzor pisem telezritelei za sentiabr’ 1972 g.).

¹¹ For lists of programs and schedules for holiday dates, see for example “Perepiska s Ministerstvami Kul’tury SSSR i RSFSR o rabote GURI tom I. Letter of 21 Jan 1956” (GARF f. 6903 op. 1 d. 503 ll. 4-5); “Programma peredach tsentral’nogo televideniiia s 27 aprelia po 3 maia 1964” (GARF f. 6903, op. 1 d. 832 ll. 103-109); “Protokol #29 zasedaniiia Gosudarstvennogo komiteta Soveta Ministrov SSSR po televideniiu i radioveshchaniiu, “O novogodnykh programmakh Tsentral’nogo Televideniiia,” (1971) (GARF f. 6903, op. 32, d. 13, l. 54).

¹² In 1974, Central Television had to remind its staff that broadcasting episodes of the American cartoon “Mighty Mouse” was not an appropriate accompaniment to Nixon’s visit in 1974. “Dokumenty k zasedaniiiam kollegii Goskomiteta,” (GARF f. 6903 op. 32 d. 385 l. 174).

center.”¹³ In other words, these television holidays had much in common with religious celebrations in the home—the seder or the Christmas feast, for example.

The opening of the Ostankino Television Center in 1967 and the commencement of satellite broadcasting the same year dramatically expanded the potential audience for expensively produced, symbolically elaborate, centralized celebrations.¹⁴ Over the course of the 1960s and 1970s, Soviet Central Television successfully created entertaining television holiday programs and rituals that reflected the new political world of the post-Stalin era and encouraged the celebration of Soviet state holidays in the home. One indicator of this success is the fact that individual television programs and holiday television rituals created during the Brezhnev era continue to be part of holiday celebrations in Russia today. Although their contents have changed, the Russian television New Year still includes *Little Blue Flame* and *Song of the Year*.¹⁵ The tradition of a live television greeting from the country’s leader just before midnight on New Year’s Eve has only gained political significance since it was introduced by Leonid Brezhnev on 31 December 1970.¹⁶ The content of these three television traditions has changed, but their forms have remained strikingly similar: *Little Blue Flame* is still a variety show gathering leading political and cultural lights, and *Song of the Year* is still a national popular musical contest.

The notion of celebrating Soviet state holidays with depolitized music and gaiety was not original to the post-Stalin era.¹⁷ But the task of negotiating between

¹³ Dayan and Katz, 145.

¹⁴ By 1970 there were roughly 35 million television sets in the USSR. In 1974 approximately 67% of Soviet families owned a television set, 90% in most urban areas, and Central Television’s signal reached 70% of the Soviet population. See Kristin Roth-Ey, “Finding a Home for Television in the USSR, 1950-1970,” *Slavic Review* 66, 2 (2007), 278. See also Ellen Mickiewicz, *Media and the Russian Public*, 19.

¹⁵ Both are currently broadcast on the Rossiya network.

¹⁶ The tradition of a New Year’s greeting from the Soviet state to its people originated earlier, on Soviet radio. In 1935 M. I. Kalinin delivered New Year’s congratulations to Soviet polar explorers. The first address to the entire Soviet people, again delivered by Kalinin, took place in 1941, in the first winter of the Second World War. These addresses continued through the war years but then ceased, only to resume in 1953, with an official holiday message from the Party and state delivered not by an official but by radio’s news readers. Brezhnev’s personal delivery of the message was unprecedented. “*Pozdravleniia naroda s Novym godom: Putin ubral bokaly El’tsina i vyshel na ulitsu*,” *News.ru*, 28 December 2007, http://www.newsru.com/russia/28dec2007/last_song.html. In the post-Soviet period, the most striking use of the New Year’s greeting was by Boris Yel’tsin, who used the moment to announce his own retirement and his appointment of Vladimir Putin to serve out his term. Putin, whom very few had heard of at the time, then delivered his own New Year’s greeting.

¹⁷ Petrone, 6-7. There is a rich literature on the dilemmas of Soviet cultural production and its relationship to audience tastes and demand. For holidays see Petrone, 19-20; Soviet fiction and the book market see the press see Thomas Lahusen, *How Life Writes the Book: Socialist Realism and Real Socialism in Stalin’s Russia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997); Evgenii Dobrenko, *The Making of the State Writer: the Social and Aesthetic Origins of Soviet Literary Culture* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2002); Vera Dunham, *In Stalin’s Time. Middle Class Values in Soviet Fiction*. 2nd ed. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990); Brian Kassof, “The Market’s Two Bodies,” (presented at the East European Colloquium, Institut für Osteuropäische Geschichte und Landeskunde, University of Tübingen, Tübingen, Germany, June 2005) and Matthew Lenoe, *Closer to the Masses: Stalinist Culture, Social Revolution, and Soviet Newspapers* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004). For film see Denise Youngblood, *Movies for the Masses: Popular Cinema and Soviet Society in the 1920s* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992) and Joshua First, “From Spectator to “Differentiated” Consumer: Film Audience Research in the Era of Developed Socialism,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 9, 2 (Spring 2008): 317-44. See also the discussion “Audience and Society in the Post-Stalin Period” in *Kritika*:

audience tastes and the state's objectives to create television holiday programming took place in new circumstances after 1953. Nikita Khrushchev's "new deal" with the Soviet populace, which included the effort to base the Party's authority on persuasion rather than coercion, encouragement of popular initiative in governance, renewed internationalism, and the desire to engage Soviet audiences in defining distinctive Soviet norms of taste during the Cold War, had transformed the circumstances in which these negotiations took place.¹⁸ These new circumstances combined to create a particular problem: the line-up of performers included in the most popular and highly anticipated television holiday concerts seemed to require justification on air.

This chapter will explore how *Little Blue Flame* and *Song of the Year* began to explicitly stage the relationship between their content and popular demand. The problem of appearing responsive to audience demand, I will argue, led these shows to playfully represent new social relations and new grounds for decision-making in the sphere of culture that did not refer back to the Communist Party's role as cultural vanguard. The most unorthodox of these proposals emerged only after the August, 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia, an event that brought a sudden end to the optimism of the Soviet intelligentsia and reform-oriented elites in the Party about a better socialist future.¹⁹ It was precisely this loss of hope that led to the creation of a group of new television holiday shows that reflected a Soviet social world in which social and generational conflict was the norm. The end of optimism about the triumph of Soviet socialism led to a search for new ways to stage and ameliorate these conflicts, including contest programs. Thus we find, with *Song of the Year*, the adaptation of a musical contest format borrowed, in part, from Western Europe's Eurovision contest, an event that was similarly designed to overcome conflict and unify a diverse population, consolidating "Western" Europe.

The story of Central Television's most important holiday shows and how they changed over time offers us a fresh approach to the Brezhnev era, one that focuses on the state-controlled mass media as an important locus of cultural innovation that was, paradoxically, catalyzed by the political events that ushered in "stagnation."²⁰ Long before the arrival of Gorbachev's *perestroika*, Cold War pressure and changing domestic political conditions led Central Television to open up politically important questions of

Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History 6, 4 (Fall 2005). See Chapter 2 of this dissertation for more detail.

¹⁸ On Stalin's "big deal" and Khrushchev's "new deal" see Vera Dunham, *In Stalin's Time*, 3-5 and Zubok, *Zhivago's Children*, 88-89, 122-130. Television's entertainment and holiday programming was another significant arena, I would like to argue, in which the "dilemmas of de-Stalinization" played out over the course of the next two decades. Polly Jones, "Introduction," in *The Dilemmas of de-Stalinization: negotiating cultural and social change in the Khrushchev era* (London: Routledge, 2006), 1-14.

¹⁹ Zubok, 282-296. The trial of Sinyavsky and Daniel was another, earlier turning point. For a detailed account, see Stephen Bittner, *The Many Lives of Khrushchev's Thaw. Experience and Memory in Moscow's Arbat* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 200-210; and Zubok, 259-282.

²⁰ It thus builds on the work of several scholars that have focused on cultural change and continuity in Soviet and Russian popular culture, and who have admirably addressed the entire pre-Revolutionary to post-Soviet period. See Richard Stites, *Russian Popular Culture*; and David MacFadyen, *Songs for Fat People. Affect, Emotion, and Celebrity in Russian Popular Song, 1900-1955* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2002); *Red Stars. Personality and Soviet Popular Song, 1955-1991* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2001); and *Estrada?! Grand Narratives and the Philosophy of the Russian Popular Song since Perestroika* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2002).

taste to audiences in ways that could have unpredictable consequences, even when those contests were highly staged and artificial. The methods for adjudicating disputes, both among different social groups within the TV audience and between TV viewers and the state over matters of musical taste raised troubling political questions and reflected the breakdown of assumptions about the unity of the Soviet people. They also created a framework that could very rapidly be filled with new content once censorship began to weaken in the mid 1980s, and that could transition relatively seamlessly to post-Soviet television. But in order to understand how this happened, we have to consider how and why New Year's musical concerts and variety shows came to be the most prominent holiday programs on Central Television in the first place.

Defining Soviet Television Holidays

Central Television's holiday programming might have been very different. In August of 1967, Nikolai Mesiatsev, the Chairman of the State Television and Radio Committee [henceforth *Gosteleradio*], submitted a proposal to the Propaganda Section of the Central Committee *apparat* for the creation of a new national television ritual, to be launched for the 50th anniversary of the October revolution.²¹ The plans were grandiose. For weeks before the anniversary, Central Television would broadcast special programs instructing Soviet families about the elaborate preparations each family member was to undertake. Men were to create places for "Lenin bonfires" in their town, women were to prepare special bread and salt recipes, girls were to prepare small presents, and boys were to clean and ready historical sites linked to the revolution. Family members should keep their activities secret from one another via the use of secret codes, which Central Television would also provide. When the day of the holiday arrived, each family member would play his or her part, cued by the television set, until the holiday broadcast reached its climax with an appearance by Brezhnev himself on screen, addressing the citizenry and calling on them to stand up and go outside. At the very moment they did, the program would switch over to radio broadcast towers in the streets, and all the historical sites prepared by the men and boys would be suddenly illuminated.²²

Mesiatsev's proposal implausibly combined the costliest elements of postwar French *son et lumière* spectacle, an ambitious vision of television's power as a medium of direct social control, and, at the same time, a remarkable ambivalence about the role television could or should play in the remaking of Soviet holiday rituals in the post-Stalin era.²³ After all, the central moment of the ritual asked audiences to stand up, turn off their sets, and go outside. The new ritual also offered nearly countless opportunities for spectacular failure. It was summarily dismissed in a letter from Pavel Moskovskii, the head of the Central Committee Propaganda Section and his deputy Alexander Yakovlev (later Gorbachev's close associate and chief official in charge of media and propaganda during *perestroika*), who noted that it was hardly a good idea to "regiment the behavior of Soviet people with a call to go out into the streets, take off their hats, embrace, etc." especially since at that hour, 10 pm Moscow time, "popular celebrations will already be

²¹ Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Noveishii Istorii (RGANI) f. 5 (Apparat Tsentral'nogo Komiteta KPSS), op. 59, d. 28 ll. 105-125 (Letter from N. N. Mesiatsev 23 August 1967).

²² *Ibid.*

²³ For a full account of the Communist Party's ambivalence about television technology, see Kristin Roth-Ey, "Finding a Home for Television."

going on in parks and square.”²⁴ Local Party organizations had already made plans for popular festivities that would “take into account national characteristics and local conditions.”²⁵ As Yakovlev’s comments suggest, Mesiatsev’s proposal was a bad idea because it could not take into account “local conditions” such as, for example, linguistic and confessional differences and whether or not a particular Soviet town actually had any usable historic sites from the civil war period that would not raise unintended memories about the imposition of Bolshevik power.

The rejection of Mesiatsev’s ritual did not mean, however, that television should not try to engage the entire Soviet television audience at holiday times. Television’s early, experimental years before the war, and its first post-war decade, had imitated the holiday orientation of Soviet radio. Among the very earliest, experimental television broadcasts in Moscow was a film recording of the Revolution Day parade on Red Square.²⁶ The first live holiday broadcast from Red Square was in May, 1956.²⁷ Like Soviet radio, television also broadcast what popular entertainments they could acquire during the festive period surrounding holidays and Party Congresses.²⁸

As we saw in Chapter 1, the thaw brought a new sense of meaning and purpose to Central Television’s young staff. It transformed the Soviet understanding of television technology, and of television’s relationship to festivity. Indeed, what is most striking about the enthusiastic writings and memories of television in this period is the belief that *all* television as festive. For a key cohort of television staff and some sympathetic members of the artistic intelligentsia, television was a new medium for new times. Television’s formal qualities, they believed, particularly its liveness, intimacy, and the penetrating gaze of the camera, would usher in a new era of sincerity, authenticity, and spontaneity.²⁹ Their hopes for television were closely tied to their own immense optimism about the future of a Soviet state that, they hoped, could return to the true path to communism under the leadership of the resurgent Soviet intelligentsia.³⁰ They understood television as a way for viewers to meet and learn from the new Soviet persons of the thaw—artists, intellectuals, scientists, and cosmonauts—and to experience the new

²⁴ “Letter from P. Moskovskii and A. Yakovlev 20 October 1967,” (RGANI f. 5, op. 59, d. 28 l. 142.)

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 143.

²⁶ A. Ia. Iurovskii, “Ot pervykh opyтов k reguliarnomu veshchaniiu,” *Virtual’nyi muzei televideniia i radio*. http://www.tvmuseum.ru/catalog.asp?ob_no=4622&page=3

²⁷ Zubok, 150; “Perepiska s Ministerstvami Kul’tury SSSR i RSFSR o rabote Gosudarstvennoe Upravlenie Radioinformatsii (9 May 1956-30 November 1956),” (GARF f. 6903, op. 1., d. 514, l. 16).

²⁸ Acquiring them was quite difficult, since Central Television ranked quite low in the Soviet media hierarchy in the 1950s. See Roth-Ey, “Finding a Home for Television,” 290-293. Central Television’s leadership had to request assistance at the level of the Ministry of Culture or the Central Committee to procure the right to broadcast recent films and plays at holiday times. See for example “Letter to Comrade N.A. Mikhailov, USSR Minister of Culture, from Jan 28, 1956,” (GARF f. 6903, op. 1, d. 513, l. 5).

²⁹ See Zubok, 150-153; Roth-Ey, “Mass Media,” 314-392. The most eloquent voice setting forth this vision of television’s purpose was the literary and theater critic Vladimir Sappak, whose book *Television and Us* remained influential among Soviet television staff for decades. Sappak, *Televideenie i my: chetyre besedy* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1963).

³⁰ In this, these young television workers resembled their contemporaries in print journalism, who claimed an ambitious role for themselves in remaking Soviet society and began to orient themselves toward Soviet educated society, or *obshchestvennost’*, rather than toward the Party leadership above them. See Thomas Wolfe, *Governing Soviet Journalism: the Press and the Socialist Person after Stalin* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005); Zubok, 140-143.

vitality of Soviet everyday life.³¹ Their case was strengthened by a series of festive occasions, including the 1957 International Youth Festival in Moscow and the celebration of Yuri Gagarin's space flight in April 1961, in which television coverage played a significant role for the first time.³² It also helped that in the second half of the 1950s watching television was a pastime accessible to a few million people—the number of television sets in the USSR reached 1 million in 1957—but it was still a thrilling novelty for most.³³

This was, however, only one among several competing understandings of television's purpose during the thaw. Many viewers saw television as a way of pleasantly passing the new leisure time that resulted from Khrushchev's shortening of work hours.³⁴ Writing to Central Television, they were emboldened by Khrushchev's promises that Soviet life would finally become more comfortable after so many decades of suffering, by his call for citizens to take part in the work of governance, and simply by the end of mass terror.³⁵ Their claims were strengthened by Khrushchev's emphasis on Cold War competition with the West in the arena of consumer lifestyles and modern technology.³⁶ Television in the home was a key attribute of the Soviet "good life," appearing almost without exception in images of Soviet citizens moving into new private apartments.³⁷ Ensuring that new television sets provided their viewers with relaxing entertainment after a long day at work was sometimes seen as a form of Cold War competition with the United States. Yet others inside Central Television, in the intelligentsia, and in the Party leadership were quite ambivalent about television as a medium for entertainment, particularly as its audience grew beyond educated elites in a handful of the largest cities.³⁸

The story of *Little Blue Flame* illustrates how these competing visions of television's role in Soviet life shaped Central Television's holiday programming. The most famous Soviet holiday show of all, *Little Blue Flame* was originally conceived as a weekly variety show and broadcast every Sunday night from 10 pm to midnight.³⁹ By 1970, however, *Little Blue Flame* was exclusively a holiday program, broadcast five

³¹ On efforts to bring "culture" to the Soviet people, see Catriona Kelly, *Refining Russia: Advice Literature, Polite Culture, and Gender from Catherine to Yeltsin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

³² Zubok, 150-151.

³³ Georgii Kuznetsov and Nikolai Mesiatshev, "Zolotye gody otechestvennogo televideniya (1957-1970)," *Virtual'nyi muzei televideniya i radio*, http://www.tvmuseum.ru/catalog.asp?ob_no=4623.

³⁴ Zubok, 123.

³⁵ On letter-writing during the thaw see Denis Kozlov, "'I have not read, but I will say': Soviet Literary Audiences and Changing Ideas of Social Membership, 1958-66," *Kritika* 7, 3 (2006): 557-597. See also Roth-Ey, "Mass Media," 239.

³⁶ See Roth-Ey, "Finding a Home for Television," Susan Reid, "Cold War in the Kitchen: Gender and the De-Stalinization of Consumer Taste in the Soviet Union under Khrushchev," in *Slavic Review* 61, 2 (2002): 211-252; Greg Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front: the Soft Power of Midcentury Design* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

³⁷ For examples see the collection of TASS and Sovinformbiuro photos under "Sem'ia, zhilishche, otdykh," in the photo collection of the Moskovskii Arkhiv Dokumentov na Spetsial'nykh Nositeliakh, for example numbers I-18660 (1959), I-20459 (1957), I-20738 (1959). See also Roth-Ey, "Finding a Home for Television, 293-294, 302-305.

³⁸ Roth-Ey, "Finding a Home for Television," 298-306.

³⁹ Valentina Shatrova, "Rozhdeniia Golubogo Ogon'ka," *Virtual'nyi muzei televideniya i radio*, http://www.tvmuseum.ru/catalog.asp?ob_no=10536

times a year, on March 8, May 1, May 9, November 7, and the night of December 31-January 1.

How *Little Blue Flame* became a holiday special

First broadcast in April, 1962, *Little Blue Flame* was a variety show shaped by the new social styles and settings of the thaw. The program's creators, a team of editors and directors from the popular music and variety stage division [*otdel estrady*] of Central Television's Musical Programming Desk, modeled the program on the "youth café" that opened on Gorkii Street in Moscow in 1960. That café had quickly become a very popular gathering spot for an educated and free-thinking young crowd drawn by performances by poets and musicians.⁴⁰ Combining this new café setting with the humor and musical traditions of the Russian variety stage, *Little Blue Flame* gathered actors, musicians, poets, television professionals, foreigners, cosmonauts, and representatives of the national republics around café tables set with tea, fruit, and other treats.⁴¹ In keeping with the principles of thaw television, the program was minimally scripted.

Little Blue Flame presented a picture of Soviet society constituted on very different terms than those reflected in the holiday parades on Red Square. On *Little Blue Flame*, Soviet society appeared as a relatively nonhierarchical, voluntaristic, international community based on friendship, with a revitalized intelligentsia at the center of things. The show emphasized the new sights, sounds, and people that the thaw had opened up to Soviet audiences.⁴² Like other premier thaw television programs of the early 1960s, *Little Blue Flame* aimed to offer viewers the experiences of interaction with new kinds of model socialist persons and of virtual travel, not only to its Moscow youth café as an alternative center, but also around the Soviet Union and the world.⁴³ A February, 1963 broadcast hosted by the actors Vasilii Lanovoi and Liudmila Khitiaieva took travel as its theme, and featured a lengthy discussion of what kinds of virtual travel the actors and other Soviet citizens might enjoy, given that literal travel, especially abroad, was nearly impossible.⁴⁴ The show likewise saw itself as bringing the world to viewers, by inviting foreign musicians touring in Moscow to appear on the show. In 1962-63 these included the winners of the Tchaikovsky International Musical Competition, and the Italian opera theater of La Scala, among others.⁴⁵

The place of the Party in this portrait of Soviet society was, by contrast, very unclear. The Central Television news anchors and program announcers, who often hosted, might be construed as the Party's representatives, but they played a quite passive role. Moreover, in the early 1960s they were still seen as domestic figures, known among

⁴⁰ Shatrova, "Rozhdenie Golubogo Ogon'ka."

⁴¹ On the history of the Russian and Soviet variety stage from 1900-1955, see MacFadyen, *Songs for Fat People*. For a detailed discussion of *Little Blue Flame*'s connections to the intellectual and social currents of the thaw, see Roth-Ey, "Mass Media," 233-238.

⁴² For more on the thaw as a revelatory visual, aural, and personal experience see Eleonor Gilburd, "Picasso in Thaw Culture," *Cahiers du Monde Russe* 47, 1-2 (2006) 65-108; Zubok, 89-120.

⁴³ *Little Blue Flame* is often grouped with the news program *News relay* (*Estafeta novostei*) and the quiz and humor game show *KVN* (*Klub veselykh i nakhodchivyxh*) in the memoirs of television workers from this period. On *News Relay*, which was especially associated with virtual travel and direct contact between intelligentsia and obshchestvennost', see L. A. Zolotarevskii, *Tsitaty iz zhizni* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1971)

⁴⁴ "Na Goluboi ogonek" No. 49 Feb. 16 1963" (GARF f. 6903, op. 26, d. 436, efirnaia papka 4564).

⁴⁵ Shatrova, "Rozhdenie Golubogo Ogon'ka."

viewers by diminutive nicknames.⁴⁶ Although they read official pronouncements on air, their relationship to the Party was somewhat less clear than it would be by the early 1970s, when a new Chair of Gosteleradio, Sergei Lapin, called them “the Kremlin’s trusted representatives.”⁴⁷

Little Blue Flame’s attempt to combine a heterodox, festive model of Soviet political life with a weekly entertainment show quickly ran into problems. The program immediately came under pressure from above to include more conventional Soviet heroes, model workers and military officials, whose presence was not always as spontaneous or friendship-based as the show’s format proposed. Already in 1963, barely a year after its first broadcast, Central Television was receiving complaints, in both letters and in sociological audience surveys it had begun to conduct, that the show had lost its initial charm. *Little Blue Flame* “only rarely lives up to its name: it is neither interesting, nor lively, nor warm,” one employee of the Ministry of Trade wrote on a Central Television survey form. “It features the strangest conversations about achievements in production...boring, long reports of various kinds. It would be nice to hear more good music, more songs, more witty humor.”⁴⁸ At the same time, the show’s focus on humor and lighter musical genres made it an awkward vehicle for direct political messages. In 1967, Sergei Muratov, a former Central Television employee who became a prominent television critic and scholar harshly criticized the inclusion, in one regular Sunday *Little Blue Flame*, of the celebrated wartime radio announcer Yuri Levitan. Levitan had read the texts of wartime radio announcements. “They were harsh words,” Muratov acknowledged, “and they rang out solemnly [*torzhestvenno*].

But in the salon setting, surrounded by little tables, smiling girls with senseless hairstyles, and accompanied by polite applause it looked vulgar and was simply shameful. Of course, the show’s organizers obviously had other intentions: “Even an entertaining program like “Little flame” doesn’t have to be thoughtless! Let’s give it some direction, sharpen its political message. Let’s have Levitan read those announcements.” But *Little Blue Flame* is *Little Blue Flame*, and the café table is not the Presidium’s table.⁴⁹

Fulfilling audience demands for humor and light comedic genres on a weekly basis was impossible for other reasons as well. Securing popular performers was not easy, and Central Television, with its mass audience, was subject to much stricter standards of taste than other media and venues. As V. Merkulov, the Chief Editor of the Musical Programming Desk, who had enthusiastically supported the creation of *Little Blue Flame*, put it in 1962, “the task of communists in the Musical programming desk...are especially

⁴⁶ Roth-Ey, “Mass Media,” 343-349.

⁴⁷ “Stenogrammy sobranii partiynykh aktivov o gotovnosti partiinoi organizatsii sluzhb Komiteta k provedeniiu veshchaniia, sviashchennogo 100-letiiu so dnia rozhdeniiia V.I. Lenina (2 June 1970),” (TsAOPIM f. 2930, op. 1, d. 1096, l. 45).

⁴⁸ “O subbotnikh i voskresnykh radio- i teleprogrammakh (itogi anketnogo oprosa radiosluchatelei i telezritelei) (1963)” (GARF f. 6903, op. 3, d. 211, l. 18).

⁴⁹ Sergei Muratov, “Effekt vozdeistviia,” *Zhurnalist* No. 2 (1967): 30.

great and complicated when bad taste reaches us via bourgeois movies, records, and the often completely unselective “musical services” in parks, skating rinks, and trains.”⁵⁰

The expansion of Central Television’s broadcasting hours and of the television audience in the late 1950s and early 1960s also made many in Central Television’s leadership and the Central Committee uneasy. Television threatened to displace more desirable forms of leisure, such as reading or going to the theater.⁵¹ A Soviet television system that delivered large amounts of depoliticized entertainment was also very difficult to distinguish from American commercial television, which sought to attract the largest possible audience and glue them to the tube for as long as possible.⁵² By the mid-1960s, as Central Television’s leadership planned for the commencement of satellite broadcasting and the opening of the Ostankino television center, officials in charge of designing the TV schedule were calling for a schedule designed to discourage “excessive,” uncritical TV viewing. In 1967, the Central Television official responsible for programming, Anatoly Bogomolov, published an article in the Union of Journalists’ professional journal entitled “Watch Less Television!” in which he noted that “there is such a thing as too much entertainment.”⁵³

A 1965 viewer letter complaining about *Little Blue Flame* summed up these problems.

Millions of people anticipate [*Little Blue Flame*], often giving up the chance to go to the theater or cinema... Guests arrive at the homes of television owners... But from week to week, *with the exception of your holiday shows* [emphasis added], you don’t improve your work and don’t provide us with the great pleasure [*bol’shaia radost’*] that you are supposed to provide.⁵⁴

In 1965, *Little Blue Flame*’s editors and directors decided to cease production, since they felt the show had lost its original spirit and become outmoded.⁵⁵ But the show was not canceled, because of the success and continued political importance of its *holiday* broadcasts, which, as this television viewer’s letter suggests, were the exception to the rule. Denial of permission to cancel *Little Blue Flame* came direct from Nikolai

⁵⁰ “Vystupleniia kommunistov na ob’edinennom partiinom sobranii Glavnykh redaktsii. Tsentral’nogo televideniia Goskomiteta po radioveshchaniia i televideniia pri SM SSSR, 25 Jan 1962” (TsAOPIM f. 2930, op. 1, d. 31, l. 32).

⁵¹ Roth-Ey, “Finding a Home for Television,” 296-302.

⁵² In the mid 1960s, Central Television’s internal audience research organization, the Nauchno-metodicheskii otdel or NMO, was trying to define “socialist” audience research. The American TV networks used sociological studies to “discover the most fashionable, stupefying programs, in order to use them as a model and glue as many people as possible to their televisions and radios, regardless of their interests or needs,” one report observed. Soviet broadcasters, by contrast, had objectives that “coincide with the interests of viewers and listeners... That’s why,” the report continued, “our programs are not addressed to everyone, but to certain groups of people, with consideration to their activities, age, gender, education, even place of residence.” “Itogovaia spravka o rezul’tatakh sotsiologicheskogo issledovaniia popularnosti radio i televizionnykh programm, provedennego na predpriatiakh g. Moskvy,” (GARF f. 6903 op. 3 d. 277 l. 17).

⁵³ Anatolii Bogomolov, “Pomen’she smotrite televizor,” *Zhurnalist* No. 6 (June 1967), 39-41.

⁵⁴ “Obzor pisem zritelei, poluchennykh tsentral’nym televideniem v Aprele 1965 goda,” (GARF f. 6903, op. 10, d. 66, ll. 21-22).

⁵⁵ Shatrova, “Rozhdenie Golubogo Ogon’ka.”

Mesiatsev.⁵⁶ The first reason given was that the show was too popular to cancel—even with all the complaints, *Little Blue Flame* was among the most popular shows Central Television produced. This was especially true of the holiday broadcasts, which had always enjoyed greater resources of time, energy, and money. Mesiatsev reminded the Musical Programming staff of the show's high profile. Viewers judged Central Television's holiday broadcasting on two grounds, he told them: the live parade broadcast from Red Square, a significant technical feat, and the quality of that evening's *Little Blue Flame*.⁵⁷ Beginning in 1965, *Little Blue Flame* ceased to be a regular program, appearing only sporadically outside of festive dates. By 1969, it was exclusively a holiday show.

Turning *Little Blue Flame* into a holiday special, like the broader practice of increasing the broadcast of popular entertainments at holiday times, offered a way to ameliorate the tensions underlying the production of Soviet television. As in other spheres of Soviet economic and cultural production, holidays provided a way for Central Television to create the experience of bounty in an environment of limited resources.⁵⁸ Holidays acted as focal points for the Musical Programming staff's creative and logistical efforts. At the same time, a musical variety show like *Little Blue Flame* offered the Soviet state a very good way to celebrate the holidays on television. Popular music on the variety stage offered a highly effective and politically flexible way of engaging the entire Soviet audience.⁵⁹ The line-up of stars could be adjusted to reflect particular political messages, such as the desire, on the 50th anniversary of 1917, to represent the importance of the revolutionary anniversary for all Soviet people, regardless of nationality. The November 7, 1967 broadcast of *Little Blue Flame* featured famous Russian, Ukrainian, Estonian, Lithuanian, Armenian, and Uzbek vocalists, singing in Russian but also in their native languages, mostly on patriotic themes but with much lighter music mixed in, including a frivolous French song called "The Girls of My Country" performed by the Uzbek singer Batyr Zakirov.⁶⁰ Unlike Mesiatsev's proposed television ritual, it had something for everyone.

Yet the policy of linking Central Television's most popular programs to the holiday calendar raised new problems. Holidays offered a clear way to structure negotiations between the television audience and censors, ensuring that even the most apolitical entertainment retained a clear connection to state myths. But they also raised the stakes of these negotiations, by limiting them to a set number of occasions per year. These negotiations also gained importance over the course of the 1960s as concerns about the influence of foreign radio listening grew.⁶¹ Viewers were encouraged to write in, both

⁵⁶ Musical Desk staff recalled the show's near-cancellation in 1965 at another moment of crisis, in 1969. "Partsobranii Glavnoi redaktsiia muzykal'nykh programm ot 9 apreliia 1969," (TsAOPIM f. 2930, op. 1, d. 911, l. 17).

57 Ibid.

⁵⁸ Petrone, 16-18.

⁵⁹ In this, the variety stage resembled the Soviet circus. See Miriam Neirick, "When Pigs Could Fly: A History of the Circus in the Soviet Union" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2007), 1-2.

⁶⁰ Videos of their performances are available on youtube.com.

Access to their performances is available on YouTube.

⁶¹ On the history and extent of foreign radio listening in the Soviet Union and the Soviet state's response

On the history and extent of foreign radio listening in the Soviet Union and the USIA's state response see Roth-Ey, "Mass Media," 250-257; Mickiewicz, *Media and the Russian Public*, 137-142; Michael Nelson, *War of the Black Heavens: The Battles of Western Broadcasting in the Cold War* (Syracuse, NY:

as a way of demonstrating the state's responsiveness to viewer demand, and as a way of engaging them in dialogue about matters of taste that were also matters of Cold War politics.

Ideas about television's nature as a medium also raised the stakes for these negotiations. The show had been founded on the idea that television was a powerful medium for the promotion of model Soviet persons—the television camera would allow viewers to penetrate external appearances and see the true nature of those on screen, allowing them to connect deeply with the model persons featured. The flip side of this belief was that persons featured needed to be politically acceptable, and also look appealing in close-up.⁶² Yet deciding which performers' musical styles and appearances were acceptable was increasingly challenging. Stalin's criticism of "vulgar" Marxism from the perspective of "objective" science in the late 1940s, followed by Khrushchev's criticism of "Stalinist deviations" from true Leninism in the mid-1950s, combined with the rejection of mass terror after Stalin's death to dramatically widen the range of political and ideological questions that did not have clear answers.⁶³ This was particularly true for foreign culture, toward which the Soviet state had always had an ambivalent relationship.⁶⁴ In the absence of an objective canon, it was impossible to be certain whether any individual foreign song or musical influence was good and internationalist or bad and cosmopolitan; each case was potentially open to interpretation.⁶⁵ At the same time, the thaw unleashed the expression of opposing viewpoints in the intelligentsia, the public, and within the state and Party apparatus itself. As a result, on Soviet television holiday programs, the line-up of artists was subject to last minute changes; editors met shortly before the holiday to view recorded performances and cut acts they found inappropriate or add those they felt had to be included. Censorship could, paradoxically, create unpredictability. Even after the end of live broadcasting of holiday concerts, in the mid-1960s, the broadcasts of these shows could be quite unpredictable.

One final factor increased the importance of a small set of holiday television shows as a forum for negotiations with the television audience: the fact that the holiday calendar itself had a central occasion for symbolic exchange between state and people: the New Year's holiday. The New Year, the only Soviet holiday with no connection to either 1917 or 1945, was also the holiday most closely associated with, on the one hand, intimate relationships and emotions and, on the other, entertainment. It is therefore not surprising that it was also the holiday most associated with television. Television, like radio, plays a key role in New Year's celebrations simply because you need the television or radio set to tell you when the exact moment of midnight occurs. From the early 1960s, but definitively by 1968, the New Year had become the most important holiday in the television calendar.⁶⁶ Cyclical programs concluded their arcs during the New Year's

Syracuse University Press, 1997); Maury Lisann, *Broadcasting to the Soviet Union: International Politics and Radio* (New York: Praeger, 1975).

⁶² Editing decisions about holiday show line-ups included instructions about whom not to show in close-up, for cosmetic as well as political reasons. See for example "Protokoly zasedanii obshchestvennogo soveta telezritelei pri Tsentral'noi Studii Televideniia (1960)," (GARF f. 6903, op. 1, d. 666, ll. 18-20).

⁶³ Yurchak, *Everything was Forever*, 162-166.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 162.

⁶⁵ Yurchak, *Everything was Forever*, 164.

⁶⁶ One indication of this change was the decision, after August 1968, to move the broadcast an expensive, all-live television holiday program called *Odin chas iz zhizni rodiny* [One hour in the life of the

season, and the most expensively produced programs, concerts, and television films were broadcast then.⁶⁷ The New Year's holiday, and, within it, the New Year's Eve broadcast of *Little Blue Flame*, and, after 1970, *Song of the Year* on New Year's Day, thus became Central Television's main forum for representing the relationship between audience demand and the entertaining content it offered them.

Gift exchange on *New Year's Flame* in the 1960s

The New Year's broadcasts of *Little Blue Flame* in the 1960s found the show's cafe tables set around a New Year's tree; guests threw streamers and had confetti in their hair. The program's action centered on the exchange of New Year's toasts and well-wishes between the guests in the café and to the audience at home, gathered at holiday tables that mirrored the ones in the cafe. This connection was made explicit beginning in the late 1960s, when the show began to feature "visits" to the homes of worker and artistic celebrities who were shown gathered with their families around a laden holiday table.⁶⁸ The guests were made up of the usual suspects from Stalin's gift-giving discourse—explorers (now cosmonauts), women, non-Russian Soviet nationalities—but now with a rather heavily overrepresented artistic intelligentsia at the center of things. There were merry role-reversals and other carnival magic, but for the most part there was comedy and musical numbers, offered spontaneously or elicited by a graceful invitation from the program's hosts.

This way of presenting the evening's entertainments amounted to an implicit exchange of gifts—a useful device, since one cannot choose what gifts one will receive from others—but also a natural one for the New Year's holiday. Often this was accomplished simply, by indicating that the performer had chosen the number in question him- or herself, or without reference to any process of selection—a simple announcement by the *dictor*-host of the song's title, for example. Beginning in the 1963 New Year's broadcast, however, the notion that the songs were gifts began to be employed explicitly. In 1963, the concept was introduced very late in the program, at the end of the second, post-midnight half of the show, with a skit by the comedians Lev Mirov and Mark Novitskii.⁶⁹ In it, Mirov and Novitskii greedily anticipate opening the "gifts" under the studio's tree, only to discover that they are two taped performances, one by a performer

motherland, later shortened to *Chas rodiny* or *One hour in the Motherland*] from the November 7 holiday to the New Year. The show, which was a national, television equivalent of *Den' Mira* [A day in the world], a 1960 book produced by Aleksei Adzhubei's *Izvestiia* and featuring the events of a single day all around the world that was landmark thaw journalism (but also a remake of a 1937 *Den' mira* edited by the writers Mikhail Kol'tsov and Maksim Gorky). Created for the 50th anniversary of 1917 (and first aired in November 1967), the show began, from 1968, to be broadcast on the evening of December 31. Major new television programs were launched during the New Year season, such as the new news program, *Vremia*, on January 1, 1968.

⁶⁷ To mark their distinctive position, New Year's broadcasts of *Little Blue Flame* were often called by their own name, *New Year's flame* [*Novogodniy ogonek*], a privilege which did not extend to other holidays.

⁶⁸ This change was most likely the result of increased resources for expensive travel to film these model viewers in their homes. See for example *Novogodnyi ogonek* "Samaia vysokaia," December 31, 1967. Footage viewed in October 2006 at the Russian Ministry of Communications' Gosteleradiofond storage facility in Reutovo, Russia. Also available on DVD. *Goluboi ogonek 1967* (Bomba Music, 2005) DVD recording.

⁶⁹ *Goluboi ogonek 1963* (Bomba Music, 2005) DVD recording.

from the GDR named P. Boettcher⁷⁰ and one of the Ukrainian child singer Boris Sandulenko singing “O Sole Mio” in Italian.⁷¹ The show’s closing act sought to address the sense that these “gifts” could not easily be reciprocated: after the taped performances were over, Mirov expressed anxiety that he and Novitskii had nothing to give in return. The safe completion of the symbolic transaction was ensured by the host, however, who informed them that Central Television has already prepared a gift—a toast from the Soviet cosmonauts to the Soviet people and “our foreign friends.”

In the 1967 New Year’s *Flame*, the gift-giving device was used to motivate a much larger percentage of the program’s content.⁷² That year, the program was broadcast from “Seventh Heaven,” the restaurant atop the newly completed Ostankino television tower. An opening animated sequence revealed that the tower had been turned into a Christmas tree posing a problem: how could it be decorated? In a series of role reversals typical of the program, one guest, a real Soviet pilot in full uniform, organized a group of actors who had played pilots in recent movies to conduct a military operation to decorate the “tree.” Each actor stood up from his table and, with a cut-away special effect, was (poof!) transformed into his costumed military film character. Once the matter of decorations had been addressed, the pilots had to “hang the presents,” and more merriment ensued as they accepted presents from guests arriving from afar (including three hockey players who had been to Poland and brought back a “gift” from a Polish singer, Irena Santor, entitled “So many lovely girls”). The show also made repeated reference to the “gift” given by Moscow builders—the construction of the new television tower, tallest in the world. Equipped with planes, the “pilots” delivered presents directly to representative citizens watching at home, in this case, an Azerbaijani couple celebrating their platinum wedding anniversary, who were briefly shown in their home.

Yet the device of gift-giving was not always seen as sufficient explanation for the appearance of certain performers rather than others on *Little Blue Flame*. This was particularly true in the program’s first broadcasts. The first *New Year’s Flame*, in 1962, used a lottery ball machine on air to “determine” which performances from the past year would be rebroadcast that evening. Later on, the *dictor*-hosts unveiled a call center that took viewer requests, half in jest (the telephone operators also sang and danced) and perhaps half seriously, since in these early years Central Television was accustomed to receiving immediate viewer feedback by phone.⁷³ In 1963, Mirov and Novitskii performed a sketch at the beginning of the broadcast, pretending to determine the line-up

⁷⁰ This spelling is an approximation, since I have not been able to find any further information about this singer beyond his or her appearance on *Goluboi ogonek* in 1963. The Russian transliteration of the name is П. Бегчер, and the song title (also given in Russian, although the song was performed in German) is “Поет.”

⁷¹ Sandulenko, age 13 in 1963, the son of a well-known singer of Gypsy romances, Leonid Nikolaevich Sandulenko, had traveled to Italy to meet the Italian child singer Robertino Loreti who was extremely popular in the Soviet Union. Sandulenko became known as the “Soviet Robertino Loreti.” Although Sandulenko was not foreign, Mirov pretended to mistake him for an Italian singer. These two performances were presented as gifts in part because they were pre-recorded. Other foreign musicians appeared on the show, including Hans Eisler and Edith Haas with the Schwarz-Weiss orchestra (GDR) and G. Germani and Z. Schra [Cxpa] from Czechoslovakia.

⁷² Novogodnyi ogonek “Samaia vysokaia,” December 31, 1967. See *Goluboi ogonek 1967* (Bomba Music, 2005) DVD recording, available at www.russiandvd.com.

⁷³ In these early days at the Central Television Studio at Shabolovka, Moscow viewers called the studio to complain about or praise a program, request a song, etc. Roth-Ey, *Mass Media*, 238-239.

with the help of a giant robot with buttons on his body devoted to different genres and performers. Mirov and Novitskii put in ten kopeks, pushed a button labeled “acrobats,” and the robot’s chest opened, letting out a troop of acrobats. Of course, with the telephone call center the program’s producers did not really cede editorial control to viewer requests, nor did the use of a lottery ball machine or a giant robot mean that decisions were made by chance, or automatically. But it is indicative of the importance of the question of responsiveness to audience taste that Central Television felt the need to appear to take requests (the call center) or externalize decision-making power to a “neutral” authority, like pure chance.

The impact of August 1968

The Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August, 1968 to crush a democratic reform movement that had inspired the Soviet intelligentsia had a dramatic impact on Central Television.⁷⁴ For the New Year’s *Little Blue Flame* the most visible change between 1967 and 1968 was the disappearance of foreign musicians, who had been unusually numerous in the 1967 show. In 1967, the post-midnight segment of the program was almost exclusively devoted to Eastern European performers, and included two songs in French by the beloved Mireille Mathieu; in 1968 no foreign performers appeared, and within the all-Soviet repertoire there was a noted Russian national theme, with an opening number entitled “Voice of the Motherland, Voice of Russia,” and performances by two Russian folk song and dance ensembles in costume.⁷⁵ These changes reflected a broader redefinition of “mass genres” to include the tastes of the older, provincial viewers that Central Television was reaching by the late 1960s, part of a broader political reorientation toward less educated audiences and Party members whose support for the Soviet state was not significantly shaken by the invasion.⁷⁶ In internal, pre-New Year’s holiday meetings in November 1968, the Musical programming desk was criticized for producing content that was disproportionately devoted to “purely entertaining” programs. A report noted that, in response, the definition of “mass” or “entertaining” [*razvlekatel’nyi*] genres—the category to which popular music and *Little Blue Flame* belonged—had been expanded to include “choral ensembles, light orchestral

⁷⁴ Brezhnev saw the Prague Spring as a direct outcome of actions by the mass media in Czechoslovakia; the years 1968-1970 inside Central Television were a time of upheaval, the assertion of stricter censorship and greater consequences for the programming editors [*redaktory*] responsible for signing off on the content of individual shows. These changes culminated in the replacement of Mesiatsev with Sergei Georgievich Lapin, a Central Committee member and favorite of Brezhnev who commenced his long reign at Gosteleradio (1970-1985) by firing 10% of the Gosteleradio staff in Moscow, including 8 of 12 Chief Editors [*glavnye redaktory*], the heads of each programming division. For a full discussion of the 1968-1970 crisis at Gosteleradio see Kristin Roth-Ey, *Soviet Culture in the Media Age* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, forthcoming), 338-342.

⁷⁵ The 1968 New Year’s broadcast was also cut in a way that highlighted the end of foreign performances: instead of the traditional post-midnight, foreign music half of the program, the first program on Central Television in 1969 was a musical TV movie produced by Tvorcheskoe Ob’edinenie “Ekran,” the television movie division of Gosteleradio that placed orders with the country’s film studios. “O merakh po dal’neishemu uluchsheniiu muzykal’nykh programm Tsentral’nogo televideiniia” and “O novogodnykh programmakh tsentral’nogo televideiniia,” GARF f. 6903 op. 1 d. 976 l. 80. Line-ups for both years are available at <http://www.russiandvd.com/store/product.asp?sku=41775&re=producta> and <http://www.russiandvd.com/store/product.asp?sku=41776&re=producta>.

⁷⁶ Zubok, 291.

music, [and] folk instruments." Programs would now focus on civic themes, revolutionary romanticism, patriotic song, and folk dancing, despite the fact that television producers and executives had long been aware that most viewers who wrote in preferred *estrada*.⁷⁷

Yet 1968 also increased the importance of popular music as a key arena of Cold War competition. As a November 1968 report from the Musical programs desk to Gosteleradio's leadership put it, in the "current stage of intensified ideological conflict, music is becoming more than ever one of the most important means of winning hearts and minds."⁷⁸ As a result, many of these new policies were quite quickly reversed. Détente in Cold War diplomacy opened the way to a more visible role for foreign musical styles; and the creation of a "good mood" for the holidays gained importance in the absence of popular political enthusiasm. The Cold War made the provision of attractive entertainments more important, at a moment when popular demand for foreign musical styles and sounds, particularly among politically crucial young viewers, was expanding rapidly.

As numerous memoirists and scholars have documented, the consumption and underground circulation of Western music increased rapidly throughout post-war period. Aleksei Yurchak has shown how this consumption and circulation was fostered by the Soviet state's contradictory approach to foreign cultural products—"its promotion of an internationalist outlook and cultural education and its attacks on bourgeois philistinism and unculturedness."⁷⁹ The difference between the two was very unstable and open to interpretation, and the Soviet state both encouraged the consumption of foreign culture and limited Soviet citizens' access to it. This paradoxical approach to foreign culture extended to the technologies that fostered that consumption: short wave radio sets, which were produced in great quantities but with a limited range, and cassette recorders, for example.⁸⁰ Since consumption of foreign culture was consistently deemed acceptable for educated Soviet citizens who were likewise interested in high culture, work, and self-development, Yurchak argues, most of the Soviet young people who listened to jazz on foreign radio broadcasts or purchased and further distributed foreign rock recordings on the black market did not recognize themselves in the press's caricatures of young rock and jazz fans, which stressed their obsessive interest *only* in foreign popular culture.⁸¹

Since holiday television programs aimed to unite the Soviet audience, television was left to catch up, as best it could in light of its much more intense scrutiny from censors, to other media in which foreign music circulated freely. By 1971, the Central Television New Year's holiday schedule again featured Czech popular musicians, and by the second half of the 1970s foreign popular music was again prominently featured in the New Year's television line-up and included styles that would have been unimaginable in

⁷⁷ See "O merakh po dal'neishemu uluchsheniiu muzykal'nykh programm Tsentral'nogo televideniia" and "O novogodnykh programmakh tsentral'nogo televideniia," (GARF f. 6903, op. 1, d. 976, ll. 14-15). A 1980 letter report described as common knowledge the fact that the majority of viewers who wrote to Central Television requested *estrada*, rather than classical genres. "Obzor pisem telezritelei (1980)" (GARF f. 6903, op. 36, d. 104, ll. 114-115).

⁷⁸ "O merakh po dal'neishemu uluchsheniiu muzykal'nykh programm Tsentral'nogo televideniia" and "O novogodnykh programmakh tsentral'nogo televideniia," (GARF f. 6903 op. 1 d. 976 l. 10).

⁷⁹ Yurchak, 175.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 175-190.

⁸¹ Yurchak, 185-187.

the early 1960s, not least because Western popular music itself had changed dramatically.⁸² However, well before the groups and sounds represented in New Year's concerts became more inclusive of youth tastes—a decision that was made well above the paygrade of Central Television's directors and editors—New Year's musical programs began to manage and dramatize the relationship between audience demand and Central Television's programming very differently.

August 1968 dealt a serious blow to the harmonious, voluntaristic thaw vision of Soviet society reflected on *Little Blue Flame*; it had also ended the Soviet intelligentsia's claim to play the most important role in Soviet life. In 1970 the New Year's show continued to include popular *estrada* performers, including the glamorous Edita P'ekha [Edyta Piecha] in a glittering gown, but it had become a stilted collection of pre-taped performances no longer unified by the elaborate gift-giving plots, expensive production values, and unscripted conversations among intelligentsia figures of the previous decade. The café set gained an elevated stage.⁸³ The show still featured popular performers, but became largely a collection of video clips, weighed down by scripted interviews with model workers. By 1972 the number of viewer letters to the show dropped to just a few hundred for the entire year, at a time when the most popular of Central Television's musical programs, including a new New Year's concert program called *Song of the Year* and a musical "lottery" called *Artlotto* were receiving tens, even hundreds of thousands of letters.⁸⁴ A 1972 report on viewer letters to Central Television put the matter directly.

Interest in the program is declining. The reason, in our opinion, is the poorly assembled program. The songs are old, and are performed by the same singers over and over. [The show] lacks humor and satire. In their letters, viewers often repeated the same request: "if it's impossible to make new broadcasts, we would be glad to watch recordings of the old ones."⁸⁵

This request was fulfilled in 1972 with the creation of a show called *Through the pages of Little Blue Flame*, which featured clips from the broadcasts of the 1960s. The holiday *Little Blue Flames* of the 1970s did not enjoy the same treatment. Remarkably, no recordings of the show between 1971 and 1979 were preserved.⁸⁶ Perhaps not coincidentally, 1971 saw the creation of a new New Year's musical program—one that aired the night after *Little Blue Flame*, in the evening on New Year's Day. Entitled *Song of the Year*, the organizing premise of this new show was not a café, but a contest.

There were several precedents for using contests as an organizing premise for holiday musical shows. Classical music competitions began to be organized with great frequency in Eastern and Western Europe beginning in the late 1940s and early 1950s, as

⁸² The Czech performers were young musicians included in a joint broadcast of the Soviet musical contest show called *Hello! We're looking for talent!* and a similar Czechoslovak show, *Zlata Kamera*, broadcast in early January. "Obzory pisem telezritelei za 1971 god," (GARF f. 6903, op. 36, d. 1, l. 6).

⁸³ "Novogodnyi ogonek," 31 December 1970. Footage viewed in October 2006 at the Russian Ministry of Communications' Gosteleradiofond storage facility in Reutovo, Russia.

⁸⁴ See for example "Obzor pisem telezritelei za 1972 g." (GARF f. 6903, op. 36, d. 2, ll. 124-125).

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ The pre-air scripts, or "efirnye papki," of these programs are, however, available, in GARF f. 6903, op. 35.

a forum for Cold War competition.⁸⁷ These classical competitions were joined, beginning in 1956, by the Eurovision international musical contest, designed as a live show for the new Western European international television network of the same name. In 1961, the Polish city of Sopot began to host a similar contest for Soviet bloc countries, in which the USSR participated and which was widely promoted in the Soviet media. Aside from these international fora, there were also precedents in the nascent Soviet recording industry. In collaboration with the Soviet record label, *Melodiia*, Central Television had created its own popular music contest for emerging young performers, called *Hello! We're searching for talent!* The program's "laureates" received recording contracts and concert engagements that helped them become professional musicians. There was also the broader context of "socialist competitions" organized in Soviet farms and factories during the Brezhnev era as a way of mobilizing Soviet workers in the absence of either material rewards or belief in the imminent arrival of communism. As these diverse precedents suggest, contests in the Khrushchev and Brezhnev eras performed several kinds of cultural, social, and political work. In some cases "winning" entailed material prizes, or personal career success; in others, awards were for collectives, or participating in the contest itself was what mattered most. Central Television's premier holiday musical "contest" of the 1970s was similarly ambiguous and multivalent.

Song of the Year

Song of the Year was part national song contest, part music industry awards show. Its basic premise was the selection, by Soviet television viewers, of the best Soviet songs written in the past year. The program ran advertisements [*reklama*] roughly each month throughout the year, featuring a few carefully selected performances and reminding viewers to write to Central Television to nominate their choices. The program itself—a lengthy concert featuring performances by the finalists, and awards for the performers, composers, and authors of the songs' lyrics—was broadcast for the first time on the evening of January 1, 1972. The lineup for this first broadcast featured a fairly narrow range of Soviet popular music composers and performers, whose acceptability on Central Television was well established. Several performers and composers, including Iosif Kobzon, Muslim Magomaev, Eduard Khil', Ol'ga Voronets, Maria Pakhomenko, and Galina Nenasheva all performed multiple numbers that year, for example; there were also two numbers by the Central Television and All-Union Radio Children's Choir.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Kirill Tomoff, "Moscow Musical Holiday: Music Competitions, Socialist Realism, and Soviet Cultural Empire in the Late Stalin Years" (paper presented at the national convention of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, Boston, MA, November 12-15, 2009). The importance of these competitions, Tomoff suggests, led to the reorganization of the Soviet musical education system along competitive lines; the same might be said of the sphere of popular music, which was also characterized by a proliferation of festivals and contests in the 1960s and 70s.

⁸⁸ For an authoritative fan site listing the line-up for every year of the show's broadcast, see <http://pesnyagoda.nm.ru>. The only non-Soviet act was a Bulgarian duet singing a song in Russian about a Soviet soldier who was killed and buried in Bulgaria, but honored by the people there. There was one hint of what was to come, in the form of a song called "Chervona Ruta" performed by the Ukrainian folk pop group (the only clearly non-Russian (or Jewish) act aside from Magomaev that year) "Smerichka." The fact that these performers were well-established on the Soviet airwaves does not mean that they were not popular with much of the audience, or that their songs were a direct and unproblematic reflection of Soviet ideology. For an eloquent discussion of the evolution of post-war Soviet estrada and its role in the articulation of new, post-Stalin forms of selfhood, see David MacFadyen, *Red Stars*.

The show's format differed significantly from *Little Blue Flame*. Rather than being broadcast for each of the five major Soviet state holidays, *Song of the Year* encouraged viewers to prepare for the show's New Year's Day broadcast all year round. In the 1970s, *Song of the Year* was broadcast from the concert hall in the Ostankino Television Center, rather than from a studio set. The concert stage was decorated for the New Year with two large New Year's trees and a smaller silver tinsel one, but the set did not mirror the holiday table in the television viewers' homes. In the first half of the 1970s, both the arrangement of people on stage and in the audience was hierarchical; the composers and lyricists whose songs had been nominated all sat together, but so did other audience groups whose dress identified them as belonging to particular professional groups, such as the military. The show's format also offered a very different way of unifying this hierarchically divided audience, by mediating, rather than transcending, the generational, political, and social conflicts of the Brezhnev era's "culture wars."⁸⁹

The show's format was related to that of a traditional Soviet "concert by requests," concerts in which each musical number selected was preceded by the name and professional title and awards of the respectable Soviet person who had requested it, usually in a letter.⁹⁰ These kinds of concerts were still broadcast on Central Television in the 1970s for the holidays of particular professions; there were also a growing number of request- or contest-based music programs in Central Television's weekend line-up by the mid-1970s.⁹¹ But *Song of the Year* was promising something quite different, since it was to reflect not the preferences of a single individual or professional group, but of the whole Soviet TV audience, determined systematically over the course of the whole year. Yet exactly how the selection of the show's 20 finalists took place remained rather vague, or was, rather, extremely overdetermined. The advertisements throughout the year proposed multiple ways for viewers to understand the task at hand, and the New Year's broadcasts justified the selection of the included songs in a dizzying number of ways.

In its first years, *Song of the Year* revealed a great deal of ambivalence about its apparent format, the contest. First, the name "Song of the Year," which is now used to refer collectively to the show's annual broadcasts, does not seem to have been used during the 1970s. The show was always referred to by the year it looked back on, as in *Pesnia-71* [Song-71], broadcast on 1 January 1972. The show was also not explicitly

⁸⁹ Stites, 148-149. *Pesnia-71*, January 1, 1972. Viewed in October 2006 at the Russian Ministry of Communications' Gosteleradiofond storage facility, Reutovo, Russia.

⁹⁰ It is not clear how often titles or professions of the requesters were mentioned as part of these "concerts by requests" on television and radio. They were in at least some television concerts by request in the 1970s, however. See for example, "Kontsert po zaiavkam shakhterov" from 29 august 1970," GARF f. 6903, op. 26, d. 1242, ef. pap. # 5941.

⁹¹ These replaced similar shows that had been canceled in 1968-69, such "Happy Birthday [S dnem rozhdeniya]" and "Be Happy[Bud'te schastlivy]." The programs of the early 1970s had more utilitarian names, such as "[Concert] Based on TV viewers' letters [Po pis'mam telezritelei]" and the "In your house [V vashem dome]," both of which were oriented toward family viewing and were broadcast on weekends. But they also included the very lively monthly musical "lottery," "Artloto", a show that playfully proposed to replace the Musical Programming desk's editors and censors with the rule of pure chance, by using a lottery machine on-air to determine the program's line-up. "Obzor pisem telezritelei 1973 goda" (GARF f. 6903, op. 36, d. 27, l. 162). For *Artloto* see GARF f. 6903 op. 26 d. 1368, *Artloto* #8, November 21, 1971. In 1974 the Musical Programming Desk created several new light musical and entertainment programs. "Otchetnyi doklad partbiuro partorg glavnii redaktsii Muzykal'nykh programm Tsentral'nogo Televidenia za period s sentiabria 1973 goda po sentiabr' 1974 goda." (TsAOPIIM f. 2930, op. 2, d. 650, l. 68).

referred to as a “contest” [*konkurs*], but rather as a “festival” or even a “viewers’ conference” [*zritel’skaia konferentsiia*].⁹² The show’s promotional “advertisements” offered contradictory accounts of how viewers were to make their selections, and what exactly they were choosing. In one November 1971 promotional spot, viewers were invited to submit not one but three songs that “they would include in the show “Best song of the year.” “Ideally,” the ad’s hostess told viewers, “these three songs would be different in character and theme.”⁹³ But another “ad,” just four days later, simply showed a reporter asking Muscovites on the street what their favorite song was.⁹⁴ This ambiguity remained in a promotional program for *Song-75*: the spot’s host, appearing behind a table laden with viewer letters, referred to the audience as members of a “viewers’ jury” [*zritel’skoe zhuri*], but one performer who appeared thanked viewers for “giving my songs your votes [*otdali svoi golosa za moi pesni*].⁹⁵

The final concert that capped each year was similarly ambiguous about whether viewers were expressing personal preferences or judgments of quality (if there was a difference), and whether the songs that were selected were the most popular or the best. In the 1971 finale, the program’s hosts (the same Central Television news anchors, Igor Kirillov and Anna Shilova, who hosted both the evening news program *Time* and the *Little Blue Flame* broadcast the night before) began the broadcast by suggesting that the songs had been selected by viewers as most popular.⁹⁶ Kirillov and Shilova then announced that Central Television had received 30,000 letters from viewers, many from collectives.⁹⁷ They then read quotes from viewer letters describing how difficult the viewers had found the task of selecting the songs. Next they introduced a row of officials who they said had participated in reading and counting viewer letters. All of these were staff members of radio and television musical shows that received their own with viewer requests, which suggested they had some independent sources of information about the popularity of songs. Shilova and Kirillov then introduced the selected performers, mentioning their victories in other musical contests, read from individual viewer letters before each song, stressed the number of letters that had come from collectives at various work places.⁹⁸

This tortured presentation of multiple legitimizing strategies took place again before nearly every song. Some songs were prefaced by testimonials from a representative of *Melodiia*, the Soviet record publishing house, that the album from which the song was drawn had sold extremely well. Some songs were not performed live, but shown in film clips from the movies in which they had originally appeared, linking the success of the song to the success of the popular movie. Before one song, the

⁹² “Pesnia-71 peredacha-reklama. No. 3 of Nov. 21, 1971,” (GARF f. 6903, op. 26, d. 1368).

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ ““Pesnia-75” Reklama No. 1” (GARF f. 6903, op. 88, 218).

⁹⁶ *Pesnia-71*, January 1, 1972. Viewed in October 2006 at the Russian Ministry of Communications’ Gosteleradiofond storage facility, Reutovo, Russia.

⁹⁷ The show’s mail increased sharply after the program’s first year; *Song-72* received roughly 100,000 letters. “Obzor pisem telezritelei za 1972 g” (GARF f. 6903, op. 36, d. 2, l. 125). This number was dwarfed by the viewer mail to Artloto, also created in 1971, which received an unprecedented 900,000 letters in 1971. Artloto, however, offered appealing prizes to viewers for entering the show’s “lottery,” including record albums and players, signed celebrity photos, and color televisions.

⁹⁸ *Pesnia-71*, January 1, 1972. Viewed in October 2006 at the Russian Ministry of Communications’ Gosteleradiofond storage facility, Reutovo, Russia.

host made reference to an explicit count of viewer votes—the viewer whose letter was read had selected *one* song by a particular composer, but another song by that same composer had received more viewer votes, so it was included in the program instead. The hosts stressed the unity of viewer opinion—claiming that viewers had supported a given song “unanimously”—and the agreement of the professional jury with the viewers’ selections. But they also referred to conflicting tastes among viewers, reading, in one case, from a letter that suggested the program have a separate category for songs preferred by people under the age of 23. This letter was quickly laughed off and countered, however, by one from a family who said that their three generations all loved a particular song.⁹⁹

The actual process of deciding the show’s finalists was similarly complex. The show’s producers were supposed to manage the voting process by carefully selecting songs and artists in the show’s “advertisements.” As the Chair of Gosteleradio, Sergei Lapin, told the show’s staff in 1977, “of course, you all know, everything is done purposefully, everything is organized, you can make any song...you can elicit a stream of letters for any song... It’s how you present them, which songs you suggest—on that, let’s say, a great deal depends.”¹⁰⁰ The show’s “advertisements” broadcasts sometimes opened with images of popular record albums from that year, and included performances of a couple of songs, that viewers were implicitly encouraged to select.¹⁰¹ These choices were supported by the entire Soviet popular music industry—songs that won in a given year were often associated with a popular movie in which they had been performed, or their record albums had been selling extremely well.

At the same time, the program had to represent the tastes of politically significant social groups whose tastes were not best reflected on a show that limited itself to the songs of the current year. *Song of the Year* quickly encountered the problem of pleasing and engaging older viewers, and of linking a show focused on current music to the memory of WWII. Did the “song of the year” have to be written in the year in question? Or could an older song win, if it was still popular and emotionally resonant for all or part of the audience? Could the same song even win every year? As Morgunova put it in November, 1971, “of course our marvelous songs from years past are still alive, still sung...are we to say that they aren’t popular, that we have forgotten them, don’t sing them, they no longer bring us joy?” In a gesture typical of the show’s open-ended format, she directed the question to viewers: “So what is the “best song of the year” How do you understand that definition? A song written yesterday? or created several decades ago, but still living and resonant?”¹⁰² Although songs from previous years were not in the group of “finalists” until 1975, the concerts did include them under other guises. The January 1, 1972 broadcast ended with a contest “of knowledge of old songs” for the audience in the hall; this led into a sing-along, including both audience and the performers on stage, of popular songs from the War and after, including a rousing rendition of “*Podmoskovnye vechera*.¹⁰³ In 1974, *Song of the Year* introduced a contest-within-a-contest called “The

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ “Stenogramma otchetnoi partiinoi konferentsii, postanovlenie, 22 December 1977” (TsAOPIM f. 2930, op. 3, d. 223, l. 86).

¹⁰¹ “Pesnia-71 peredacha-reklama. No. 3 of Nov. 21, 1971,” (GARF f. 6903, op. 26, d. 1368).

¹⁰² “Pesnia-71 peredacha-reklama. No. 3 of Nov. 21, 1971,” (GARF f. 6903, op. 26, d. 1368).

¹⁰³ “O rabote s pis’mami telezritelei” (TsAOPIM f. 2930, op. 2, d. 864, l. 147-148).

“Song Sings About Me,” which invited viewers to submit essays about a particular song—from any year—that had meaning for them.¹⁰⁴ Songs from previous years began to be included in the finalists in *Song-77*, prompting one gratified veteran to write to the show to suggest that the song “Victory Day” be included every year.¹⁰⁵

All of this entailed a very delicate balancing act. By the second half of the 1970s, the terms of that balance began to change rapidly. In the mid-1970s there were a series of policy shifts that signaled a new strategy toward domestic and foreign popular music, one that aimed to incorporate a far larger proportion of Soviet popular music into the official realm.¹⁰⁶ The desire to engage youth audiences was central, as was the growing influence of a younger generation of executives inside the Central Committee and Central Television.¹⁰⁷ In 1976 the Central Committee issued a declaration “On work with creative youth,” to which Central Television responded by creating another musical contest, *With a song through life*. This program featured young professional musicians (a key distinction when unsanctioned but regularly performing rock bands were proliferating), and ostensibly based the selection of finalists on viewer letters.¹⁰⁸ The winners of this contest frequently confirmed the success of their professional music careers by appearing on *Song of the Year*. This new show, like its predecessors, was understood as an important means of engaging and educating viewers. “The fact that television viewers participate in judging the contestants,” one television viewer wrote approvingly, “forces them to take responsibility, to be more attentive and demanding of performers and their repertoire as they grade them.”¹⁰⁹ At the same time, these contests had an effect similar to those of Soviet rock festivals that were held in the late 1970s: they helped legitimize a broader range of popular music styles. Once a group had won a prize at an official festival or contest, its path to performance space and other state-controlled resources could be somewhat smoother.¹¹⁰ More broadly, the proliferation of separate contests for separate audiences undermined *Song of the Year*’s claim to represent the choices of the entire television audience.

Song of the Year’s repertoire and hosts became younger. Popular new stars like Sofia Rotaru and Alla Pugacheva joined Kobzon and Magomaev as regulars. In 1976 *Song of the Year* began to be hosted not by the Central Television newsreaders, many of

¹⁰⁴ The show received over 1000 letters within a few weeks, mostly from older viewers; these letters were then featured in the show’s advertisements for *Pesnia-75*. Some viewers wrote in to criticize to the contest’s premise. I.G. Bardzilova, a pediatrician in Severomorsk, wrote that “song has been in my life like a best friend and trusted confidante. But I can not boast that even one of the songs selected for the contest is about me, about the difficulties I have faced in life, about the victories I have experienced.” “Obzor pisem telezritelei (January 1975)” (GARF f. 6903, op. 36, d. 40, l. 74. When a similar contest was announced on *Pesnia-76*, it was given a more neutral new name, “*Pesnia moia liubov’*.”

¹⁰⁵ The possibility that “Victory Day,” composed by David Tukhmanov in 1975 and performed by Lev Leshchenko, could or should win every year captures the temporal dilemmas of a show called *Song of the Year* in the Soviet Union’s classicizing culture. “Obzor pisem telezritelei (January 1978)” (GARF f. 6903 op. 36 d. 80 l. 66); See MacFadyen, *Red Stars*, 180.

¹⁰⁶ On Soviet rock see Artemy Troitsky, *Back in the USSR: the True Story of Rock in Russia* (London: Omnibus Press, 1987); for a lucid overview of popular music genres and milieus in the Brezhnev era see Stites, 154-167.

¹⁰⁷ John Bushnell, *Moscow Graffiti: Language and Subculture* (Winchester, MA: Unwin-Hyman, 1990), 72-73.

¹⁰⁸ “Obzor pisem telezritelei (1976)” (GARF f. 6903, op. 36, d. 53, l. 121).

¹⁰⁹ “Obzor pisem telezritelei za 1978 god” (GARF f. 6903, op. 36, d. 79, l. 127).

¹¹⁰ Troitsky, *Back in the USSR*, 39.

whom started their careers on television in the mid-1950s, but by the much younger Aleksander Masliakov, who had served as host of the Youth Programming Division's most popular game shows. The Soviet pop groups called "VIA" for "vocal-instrumental ensembles" took up a much larger proportion of the program on *Song of the Year* in the second half of the 1970s.¹¹¹ The show also began a concerted effort to represent more of the non-Russian nationalities in the concert lineup. Still, younger executives at Central Television pushed for greater responsiveness to youth tastes. Eduard Sagalaev, the youngest member of Central Television's executive body and the Chief Editor of Youth Programming, denounced the quite poppy line-up of *Pesnia-77* as having been produced "by people with an aging worldview," calling it "the television of yesterday."¹¹²

While *Song of the Year* was a national song contest, and thus did not regularly include foreign performers, a series of other holiday musical programs were created that were devoted exclusively to foreign music, *Melodies and Rhythms of Foreign Estrada*, for example, was created in 1976. It was possible to hear, in the early hours of the New Year's first morning in 1978, the sounds of "The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band," on *Little Blue Flame*, followed by "ABBA" and "Boney M" on *The Stars smile for you*, another special holiday show devoted to foreign popular music.¹¹³ These changes were not limited to pop groups; as David MacFadyen has shown the stars of Soviet *estrada* were transforming Soviet civic songs into a genre focused on the past, and laying the groundwork for the transformation of the stage into a "podium from which to effect—not reflect—glasnost'" in the mid-1980s.¹¹⁴

Conclusions

More important than the changing content of Central Television's premier New Year's musical programs was their changing form. *Song of the Year* had always offered a reflection of Soviet life as a negotiated settlement, between audience preferences and official cultural norms, and among different generational, social and national groups. Throughout the early 1980s, the show continued to include the winners of separate contests for young performers and for the beloved songs of older audiences. In the late 1970s, however, both *Song of the Year* and *Little Blue Flame* came more and more to resemble regular concerts, which featured very little explicit ceremonial devoted to representing a unified Soviet public that was either spontaneous and harmonious, as on the *Little Blue Flames* of the 1960s, or the result of a long, hard process of deliberation, negotiation and compromise, as on *Song of the Year*. For the 1977-78 New Year, *Little Blue Flame* adopted a new, much more concert-like format, which abandoned the very lengthy and stilted interviews with model workers that had characterized the show in the 70s. Younger viewers (and many older ones) responded with great enthusiasm. "Fewer words, more action," as Alexander Bulaev, a 37-year-old miner from Donetsk put it.

¹¹¹ These groups are sometimes maligned as utterly anodyne and unappealing. See Troitsky, 36-37. But they were quite popular, capable of scandalizing older and conservative viewers, and did represent a substantial innovation in terms of what was acceptable on a prominent TV show like *Song of the Year*.

¹¹² "Protokol otkrytogo partiinogo sobraniiia Glavnoi redaktsii programm dlia molodezhi ot 10 Jan. 1978. "Zadachi partiinoi organizatsii redaktsii po sozdaniiu massovykh, razvlekatel'nykh peredach" Dokladchik t. Sagalaev E.M., zam. glavnogo redaktora" (TsAOPIM f. 2930, op. 3, d. 477, l. 7).

¹¹³ "Protokoly Nn. 36-37 zasedanii kollegii Goskomiteta i materialy k nim" (GARF f. 6903, op. 32, d. 781, l. 60).

¹¹⁴ MacFadyen, *Red Stars*, 242-243.

“Although I am already 28 years old,” another viewer from the city of Gorkii wrote, “and have already left the age of uncritical praise for the “guitar” trend, I vote with both hands for this development in our entertainment programs.”¹¹⁵ Many older or more conservative viewers, however, objected vigorously.¹¹⁶ Lapin was outraged, “the entire 1977 *Flame* was [just] an *estrada* concert, he railed to a meeting of Central Television Party members after the holidays. “Of course naked propaganda is not necessary in this case, but why can’t this be done with talent...is it necessary to completely disarm?”¹¹⁷

These comments reflected the growing paradoxes at the heart of Soviet television’s holiday programming by the late 1970s. Providing popular music at the holidays, an essential part of Soviet holidays since the mid-1930s, had become both a Cold War victory and an act of surrender. By the late 1970s, Central Television was abandoning the effort to couch holiday musical entertainments in shows that offered viewers an idealized, festive portrait of Soviet society. The 1983 New Year’s broadcast of *Little Blue Flame* featured two performances, by Stas Namin and Alla Pugacheva, that were essentially music videos, with elaborate sets and costumes outside the concert space.¹¹⁸ From the late 1970s, Central Television executives began to surrender in their battle against bad, bourgeois popular music because a new generation of Soviet citizens did not believe there was a war. These changes paved the way for the sudden legalization of Soviet rock under Mikhail Gorbachev. *Pesnia-85* was staged like a simple rock concert, with the audience nearly invisible in the vast expanses of the Moscow Olympic Stadium. The acts were united by only the briefest announcements of the performers’ and songs’ names—and also their contest titles.¹¹⁹

These changes reflected larger social and political transformation in late Soviet society. Holiday programs, always designed to unite the very diverse Soviet population and put them with a “good mood for the holidays,” faced a new set of dilemmas in the 1970s, when the Soviet state stopped emphasizing the immediate arrival of communism and the population had long since ceased to believe in it. Without the assumption of this shared project defined by Soviet ideology, social and national conflicts emerged more starkly. There were collective memories available to serve as a basis for a sense of Soviet identity and common values, particularly the Second World War, but also, to a lesser extent, the songs and culture of the 1930s, which were performed in modernized versions on *Song of the Year* in the 1970s. But these sources of audience unity could not offer a way to move forward, and they increasingly failed to acknowledge the tastes of young viewers, for whom the circulation and consumption of Western rock and jazz—via every medium *except* television—was the norm by the 1970s. In response, Central Television experimented with new forms and genres that offered viewers at least a fictive way to participate in shaping television’s content, that acknowledged differences of taste within the diverse Soviet TV audience, and that sought to provide, to the extent possible,

¹¹⁵ “Obzor pisem telezritelei January 1978” (GARF f. 6903, op. 36, d. 80, l. 67-68).

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ “Stenogramma otchetnoi partiinoi konferentsii, postanovlenie (22 December 1977)” (TsAOPIM f. 2930, op. 3, d. 223, l. 86).

¹¹⁸ *Novogodnyi Ogonek*, December 31, 1983. Viewed in October 2006 at the Russian Ministry of Communications’ Gosteleradiofond storage facility, Reutovo, Russia.

¹¹⁹ *Pesnia-85*, January 1, 1986. Viewed in October 2006 at the Russian Ministry of Communications’ Gosteleradiofond storage facility, Reutovo, Russia.

something for everyone. Despite their limitations, these shows offered something that no other popular music medium could—a moving image of beloved stars. They seem to have been at least partly successful, if we can judge from their prominent place at the center of post-Soviet nostalgia for the Brezhnev era.

New Year's television programs reveal how Cold War pressures could combine with the growing ambiguity and openness of Party discourse to create unpredictable and culturally innovative shows. Even at the height of “stagnation,” in an institution as closely controlled as Central Television, holiday musical programs could propose non-Party authorities for decision-making in the sphere of culture, open up politically important questions to viewer “votes” and expose the extent of generational conflict within Soviet society. As their continued relevance in the post-Soviet present suggests, these shows created a framework that was later available for rapid changes of content and meaning. Not for nothing did the famous Soviet sports reporter, Nikolai Ozerov, appear on the 1972-73 New Year's broadcast of *Little Blue Flame* and pretend to broadcast live from its unfolding action throughout the show.¹²⁰ Like the unknowable future that the New Year's holiday puts at center stage, Soviet New Year's television shows could be watched like a sporting event, for surprise turns of events and unforeseeable outcomes.

¹²⁰ “*Goluboi ogonek*,” 31 December 1972 (GARF f. 6903 op. 35 d. 40)

On lesson day
At lesson time
We're glad to see you once again,
Merry and resourceful friends.
Take up your pencils,
We're starting our show [*vecher nash*],
Be seated quickly,
Someone will be lucky
But someone won't be...
And he doesn't like the question
And the answer doesn't add up,
But anyway
Take up your pencils,
We're starting our show,
We're awaiting you, friends!

--Opening song of *KVN*¹

KVN? KVN...KVN! Understanding the Soviet game show

Chapter 5

The most popular program on Central Television in the 1960s was a show called *Club of the Merry and Resourceful*, known by the initials of its name in Russian, *Klub veselykh i nakhodchivkh*, or *KVN*.² Created in 1961 by Central Television's Youth Programming Desk, *KVN* belonged to a discrete genre of very popular Soviet TV programs. These shows were almost exclusively produced by a small group of people in the Youth Programming Desk's division of mass-audience programming [*otdel massovykh programm*]. Their central organizing principle was a competition or contest, in which the contestants were presented as more-or-less regular people, resembling and representing television viewers at home. The contests, likewise, tested general skills and talents that most television viewers possessed: the ability to tell a joke, answer a trivia question, or make a salad, for example. Although they shared some features with sporting events, these contests were organized and produced by Central Television exclusively. They aimed to engage viewers as participants, encouraging them to play along at home and judge the contestants. Their subject matter did touch on important political and economic issues, but indirectly; a substantial part of their purpose was to entertain

¹ E. V. Gal'perina, ed. *KVN raskryvaet sekrety* (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1967), 9.

² This name also consciously referred to the first mass-produced, relatively affordable Soviet television set, the *KVN*, which was named with the initials of its inventors. See Elena Gal'perina, "KVN--Kak eto delalos' (ili Metamorfozy Kluba Veselykh i Nakhodchivkh)," *Virtual'nyi muzei televideniia i radio*, http://www.tvmuseum.ru/catalog.asp?ob_no=8725 last accessed April 11, 2010. For both the *KVN-49* television set and extensive bibliographical references on the show, its namesake, see Kristin Roth-Ey, "Mass Media and the Re-Making of Soviet Culture, 1950s-1960s" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Princeton University, 2003), 268-269, 366-376.

viewers as well as to influence them. Most of the shows offered prizes to the winning contestants. In other words, they were game shows.

Yet despite their very recognizable shared features, neither Central Television nor its audience had a single collective name for these programs. “Mass contest programs” [*konkursnye massovye peredachi*] (or just “mass programs”), “merry game” [*veselaia igra*], “entertaining-informative programs” [*razvlekatel’no-poznavatel’nye peredachi*], or “contest programs” [*konkursnye peredachi*] were all used together or separately.³ These shows were also sometimes called television *deistvo*, or “action,” a name that connected them to the revolutionary theatrical avant-garde.⁴ The word for simpler radio and television audience quizzes, *viktorina*, often appeared, but could refer to any write-in contest on any program, including those whose primary purpose was to provide direct propaganda.⁵ Most often, these shows were simply referred to by their own individual names.⁶

These multiple names reflected the multiple origins and syncretic nature of these shows. As the words to *KVN*’s catchy opening song, in the epigraph above, suggested, Soviet game shows were structured by a number of contradictory tasks. They were both didactic (“on lesson day, at lesson time”) and entertaining. They were competitions of skill but also luck (“let someone be lucky”). They sought to engage viewers as players and participants while lacking clear rules for determining winners and ensuring the fairness of the game (“And he doesn’t like the question/ and the answer doesn’t add up/ But anyway”). Their founding principles were the potentially contradictory concepts of play and competition, both of which were central, yet often problematic, concepts in Soviet ideology and propaganda.⁷ Their producers understood them as both a new kind of

³ A 1960 request to the Ministry of Finance for 250,000 rubles, to be used for paying radio and television staff to create game shows and for purchasing small prizes to be awarded to viewers, referred to these shows as “*radiotelekonkursy*” and “*radioteleviktoriny*.” GASF f. 6903, op. 1, d. 623, l. 97. See, for example, internal references to these programs as “*massovye konkursnye peredachi*” in GASF f. 6903, op. 36, d. 1, l. 485a; “*massovye peredachi*” in E. Gal’perina, M. Giul’bekian, and B. Sergeeva, eds., *KVN? KVN...KVN!* (Moscow, Komitet po radioveshchaniiu i televideniiia pri Soveta Ministrov SSSR, 1966), 9; “*veselaia igra*,” in *KVN raskryvaet sekrety*, 5; “*razvlekatel’no-poznavatel’nye peredachi*” in “*Obzor pisem telezritelei za 1978 g.*” GASF f. 6903, op. 36, d. 79, l. 55; “*konkursnye peredachi*,” in “*Protokol No. 1 partiinogo sobraniia ot 31 oktiabria 1973 g. ‘Rol’ kommunistov massovogo otdela v povyshenii ideino-khudozhestvennogo urovnia peredach.*”” TsAOPIM f. 2930, op. 2, d. 447, 1.79. The language viewers used to describe this genre was equally complex and suggestive of the absence of clear generic parameters. In the early 1970s, a Central Television report on viewer letters noted frequent requests for a “musical-entertaining game on the air [*muzykal’no-razvlekatel’naia igra v efire*].”

⁴ This particular term and the connections between game shows and Civil War-era mass festivals are discussed in detail below.

⁵ To distinguish them from these simpler audience contests, Elena Gal’perina, the editor of *KVN*, referred to these shows as a group as “merry quizzes” or “*veselye viktoriny*” in *KVN? KVN...KVN!*, 14-15.

⁶ Partly as a result of this, they have been remembered individually as *sui generis* and impossible to define. Contemporary publications about *KVN*, for example, had strangely endogenous titles like *KVN? KVN...KVN!* and *What is KVN?* When I first came across these books in the Lenin Library card catalog, I asked the librarian what “KVN” was. Her answer was “I can’t even say...I don’t even know how to explain it!”

⁷ For an illuminating discussion of the difficulty of accommodating the world of play in a Marxist analysis based on work and production, see Robert Edelman, *Serious Fun: a History of Spectator Sports in the USSR* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 7-25. On competition in Soviet economic production, see Vladimir Shlapentokh, “The Stakhanovite Movement: Changing Perceptions over Fifty Years,” *Journal of*

television sport that would capture sport's unpredictability and excitement, and as theatrical performances. They were youth programs for a mass audience.

Is it surprising that the Soviet Union had game shows? The genre is particularly associated, in the United States, with the promotion of consumer goods and lifestyles, and Soviet game show producers were careful to distinguish their work from game shows in the capitalist world. Yet when Central Television's Youth Programming staff set out to create their Soviet television game shows in the late 1950s, they were borrowing directly from precedents in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and the GDR.⁸ Soviet television game shows thus raise a number of interesting comparative questions about the origins, purposes, and consequences of *socialist* game shows, and their place within the broader flourishing of game shows on European television in the 1960s.⁹ Yet the importance of the Soviet game show was also distinctive within the Eastern bloc, since Central Television was less open than other Eastern European television services to certain popular genres that were widespread in Western Europe and the United States. Lithuanian and Estonian television, for example, had family serials that closely resembled soap opera, but Central Television never adopted that form despite its appeal as a medium for state messages.¹⁰ The most famous television programs in Czechoslovakia after 1968 were family serials focused on private life, but there were only two or three Soviet serial films that focused on the home and family, and they were much less famous.¹¹ Why did Soviet game shows flourish where soap operas and sitcoms did not?

This chapter will trace the origins and evolution of Soviet television game shows from the late 1950s to the mid 1970s, focusing on the ways their creators, censors, and audiences understood their purposes within the Soviet media system. I would like to suggest that game shows flourished on Soviet television because they offered solutions to

Contemporary History, Vol. 23, No. 2, Bolshevism and the Socialist Left (April, 1988): 259-276; and Lewis Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism and the Politics of Productivity in the USSR, 1935-1941*, Soviet and East European Studies (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

⁸ For the Czechoslovak precedents see Roth-Ey, "Mass Media," 355; Leonid Zolotarevskii, Interview with Natalia Otamas' on *Virtual'nyi muzei radio i televideniya*, http://www.tvmuseum.ru/catalog.asp?ob_no=10636. Other memoir accounts of the first Soviet game show, *VVV*, and its successor *KVN* also mention drawing on American, Polish, and East German precedents. See the interview with A. A. Alekseev in Elena Gal'perina, Marat Giul'bekian, and Bella Sergeeva, eds. *KVN? KVN...KVN!* (Moscow: Komitet po radioveshchaniyu i televideniyu pri Sovete Ministrov SSSR, Nauchno-metodicheskii otdel, 1966), 9-12. On game shows in the GDR in the 1950s see Heather Gumbert, "East German Television and the Un-Making of the Socialist Project, 1952-1965" (Ph. D. Dissertation, University of Texas, Austin, 2006), 88; and "Split Screens? Television in East Germany, 1952-1989," in *Mass Media, Culture, and Society in Twentieth Century Germany*, Eds. Karl Christian Führer and Corey Ross (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006): 146-164.

⁹ *KVN*'s producers were well aware of this broader European trend, and saw themselves as a part of it. See *KVN raskryvaet sekrety*, ed. E. Gal'perina (Moscow: Molodaia Gvardiia, 1967), 19-20.

¹⁰ The Estonian show was called *What's new in the Koosta Family?*; the Lithuanian one was called *The Petraitisov Family*. Both were first broadcast in 1965 and were still on the air in 1970 when *The Petraitisov Family* was featured in an article in the journal *Zhurnalista*. The article praised the genre, which it noted was also in use in Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, and the GDR, for "actively affecting public opinion" and "being a flexible, offensive propagandistic weapon." Vladimir Derevitskii, "V Semeinom krugu," *Zhurnalista* No. 6 (June, 1970): 18-20.

¹¹ On Czechoslovak television and "the quiet life" see Paulina Bren, "Closely Watched Screens: Ideology and Everyday Life in Czechoslovakia after the Prague Spring, 1968-1989" (Ph.D. Dissertation, New York University, 2002).

a number of political, ideological, and practical problems that Central Television, like other Soviet cultural producers, faced in the 1960s and 70s. They served as a controlled forum for the negotiation and articulation of new, post-Stalin identities for Soviet young people during the Cold War.¹² With its prominent position in the Soviet home, television was a key medium for Khrushchev's effort to direct and manage consumer demand; game shows offered a fun and lively way to engage viewers in defining modest and modern "socialist" forms of consumption.¹³ Television staff in the 1960s saw themselves as promoting a revitalized version of Soviet personhood for the post-Stalin era.¹⁴ Gameshows were an ideal medium for revealing these new norms of selfhood: new protagonists would reveal their nature through play. Audience quizzes originated in commercial newspapers and radio as a way of increasing audience interest and demonstrating audience size to potential advertisers, and they provided Central Television's directors, writers, and editors with a way to prove to their bosses that they were successfully reaching a mass audience.¹⁵ For Soviet audiences, game shows offered a chance to see ordinary people on screen, play along at home, enjoy a lively contest whose outcome was not predetermined, and sometimes win desirable prizes. The entertaining and unpredictable, yet structured and didactic game show was one of post-Stalin Soviet culture's essential genres.

Yet as their multiple names and often contradictory objectives suggest, Soviet television game shows contained a number of tensions, especially concerning judging, rules, and ensuring fair play. Many of these tensions were not unique to Soviet game shows, as the famous example of the U.S. quiz show scandals of the 1950s makes clear.¹⁶ Television contests are almost always didactic and entertaining at the same time. They dramatize public, collective processes of decision-making, raising questions of fairness and transparency about both the rules and judging and about television, which is always suspected of rigging the game. They elevate certain skills or kinds of persons for admiration and material reward. They establish authorities and contest them by referring to the ruling of an expert jury, entertaining the objections of audiences to the jury's

¹² Essential to these identities were norms of personal appearance, behavior, and taste reflected in the rich advice literature of the time. See Catriona Kelly, *Refining Russia: Advice Literature, Polite Culture, and Gender from Catherine to Yeltsin*, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2001). On the youth "problem" see Kristin Roth-Ey, "Mass Media," 46-98. For more on youth identities and the Cold War elsewhere in the world see Leerom Medovoi, *Rebels: Youth and the Cold War Origins of Identity*, New Americanists (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005). For the "youth problem" before the Khrushchev era, see Anne Gorsuch, *Youth in Revolutionary Russia : Enthusiasts, Bohemians, Delinquents* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000).

¹³ Susan Reid, "Cold War in the Kitchen: Gender and the De-Stalinization of Consumer Taste in the Soviet Union under Khrushchev," *Slavic Review*, vol. 61, no. 2 (Summer, 2002), 211-252.

¹⁴ They saw themselves in terms very similar, therefore, to those of Soviet journalists gathered around Aleksei Adzhubei at the newspaper *Izvestiia* during this period, with whom they worked closely. See Thomas Wolfe, *Governing Soviet Journalism: the Press and the Socialist Person after Stalin* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005).

¹⁵ On the early use of quizzes to boost and then measure audience size, see Thomas DeLong, *Quiz Craze: America's Infatuation with Game Shows* (New York: Praeger, 1991), 3.

¹⁶ On the U.S. quiz show scandals see Ibid.; Olaf Hoershelman, *Rules of the Game: Quiz Shows and American Culture* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2006); Kent Anderson, *Television Fraud: The History and Implications of the Quiz Show Scandals* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood, 1978).

rulings or allowing viewers to vote for their favorites.

These tensions were also far from unique to game shows within Soviet culture. Indeed, competitions of various kinds were the ubiquitous norm in Soviet everyday life. There were sports, from soccer and hockey to figure skating and everything in between, at levels ranging from young children to Olympians. There were local, regional, national, and international competitions in music, mathematics, and chess; “socialist competitions” pitting everyone from grade schoolers to factory workers against their peers; examinations, dissertation defenses, and so much more.

In a state that was anti-liberal and anti-procedural democracy, questions about fair play, clear rules, and authority to judge could become pronounced in any of these settings. But they were especially pronounced on television game shows, because game shows were unusually theatrical. Unlike socialist competitions, they were set off from the institutions of everyday life (school, place of work) and, though they were intended to mobilize viewers in an indirect way, they had no coercive dimension to encourage viewers to take part. Unlike sport, math, and chess they were not part of a larger, international field or network with its own norms. Unlike classical music competitions, they focused primarily on general skills, not specialized talents that required experts to evaluate them.

Game shows were created from whole cloth by Central Television, and every element had to be decided upon and conveyed spatially on a stage. How many judges should there be on the jury? Was a jury necessary at all? Should the jury sit on stage and talk to the contestants frequently, or sit in a balcony above them and remain silent? How should points be allocated? What is more, game shows were designed to engage viewers actively, encouraging them to put themselves in the position of the jury, with which they then might disagree. Several popular Soviet game shows became very successful off the air as well—*KVN* matches, for example, were staged by factories, schools, and local governments across the Soviet Union. Frequent requests for help in staging these matches led to the publication of manuals for local game show organizers, in which the tensions involved in judging and ensuring fair play were made extremely explicit. Game shows thus fostered public discussions about legitimacy, authority, and collective decision-making in a state in which those discussions were strictly controlled. In this context, the major elements of game shows—regular people as participants, prizes, juries, and rules for determining winners—were each a significant problem in their own right.

The content of Soviet game shows changed a great deal over time. The first Soviet TV game show was conceived as a mass festival; like the early Soviet amateur mass festivals on which it was based, the experience of participation in the action was its main content, at least as its producers saw it.¹⁷ Beginning in the early 1960s, however, game shows had a more clearly defined set of messages to convey about the ideal qualities of Soviet youth. The heroes of these shows changed—in the early 1960s, their focus was elite, mostly male, student youth, who engaged in the satirical and political play of future leaders. Beginning in 1968-1970, Central Television created game shows whose heroes were non-elites, particularly working class young women and men, who

¹⁷ There is a rich literature on early mass festivals; for two landmark studies see James von Geldern, *Bolshevik Festivals: 1917-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) and Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

competed in games that defined much more circumscribed roles in Soviet life, as workers in low-status jobs, consumers, housewives, and defenders of the Fatherland.

Even more striking than these changes in content, however, were changes in the forms these game shows took. Although (or perhaps because) they were no longer live, no longer satirical, and no longer about elite youth, the new game shows and talent contests created in the late 1960s and early 1970s turned decisively toward much more active and explicit forms of viewer participation, including the use of viewer “votes” to determine winners, in addition to or in lieu of professional juries. Viewer accusations of unfairness or incompetence in the juries’ judging, or, conversely, complaints that winners should not be determined by audience tastes, became a public feature of these shows, on the air and in the press. Game shows became a stage for debates about fair and unfair play in Soviet life and, after 1968, for experimentation with models for measuring public opinion and determining winners and losers, models that were officially prescribed, but not practiced, in Soviet political life. The evolution of Soviet television game shows and the conversations about clear rules and fair play that they elicited bore a striking resemblance to the arguments of Soviet dissidents who began, in the 1960s, to call on the Soviet state to obey its own laws.¹⁸

VVV: Game shows as *deistvo*

Central Television’s first fully realized game show was a 1957 quiz show called *Vecher veselykh voprosov* [“Evening of Merry Questions”] or *VVV*.¹⁹ Its creators were a young journalist named Sergei Muratov and two of his friends, Al’bert Aksel’rod and Mikhail Iakovlev, both talented leaders of the student amateur theater, or *kapustnik*, scene in Moscow.²⁰ Created as part of Central Television’s very extended celebration of the 1957 Moscow Youth Festival, by a special Festival Programming Desk, *VVV*’s objective was to unite the entire television audience with an entertaining program that made them participants, rather than just spectators, demonstrating television’s power as a unifying and influential new art form, not just a medium for the broadcast of films and plays.²¹ Spurred by the opportunity the Youth Festival presented to demonstrate television’s power, one of the show’s editors, A. A. Alexeev, recalled, “we decided to create a mass-audience program, in which anyone sitting in front of his television screen could become

¹⁸ See Benjamin Nathans, The Dictatorship of Reason: Aleksandr Vol’pin and the Idea of Rights under “Developed Socialism” *Slavic Review* Vol. 66, No. 4 (Winter, 2007), pp. 630-663.

¹⁹ *VVV* is discussed in more detail in the first chapter of this dissertation. For a detailed description of the show’s history see Roth-Ey, “Mass Media,” 354-366.

²⁰ For more detail on *kapustniki* see Roth-Ey, “Mass Media,” 355, note 93. Roth-Ey notes that, “thaw *kapustniki* saw themselves as continuing a pre-Revolutionary tradition of improvisational theater, including amateur student theater, that had been known by that term.” See L.P. Solntseva and M.V. Iunisov, eds., *Samodeiatel’noe khodozhestvennoe tvorchestvo v SSSR: ocherki istorii* (St. Petersburg, 1999), especially M.V. Iunisov, “Studencheskii teatr estradnykh miniatur,” pp. 281-306 and Iunisov, *Mifopoetika studencheskogo smekha (STEM i KVN)* (Moscow, 1999).

²¹ This view is repeated in numerous memoir accounts. See for example, A. A. Alekseev in *KVN? KVN...KVN!*, 9-12. Reviewing one of the show’s early broadcasts at a staff meeting in 1957, one Central Television worker praised the fact that the show’s authors and producers had “intentionally drawn the widest viewing audience into everything happening on stage.” “Stenogramma letuchki rabotnikov Tsentral’noi Studii televideniiia (14 June 1957),” GARF f. 6903, op. 31, d. 3, l. 11.

the protagonist at any moment.”²² Although the show is often described as a deeply original product of the thaw moment in which it was created, its creators and producers acknowledge that they based the show directly on a very popular Czechoslovak game show of the 1950s called *Gadai, Gadai, Gadai'shchik* or *GGG*.²³

As we saw in Chapter 1, *VVV* was broadcast before a very large studio audience, and it mixed light and humorous trivia questions with musical and other performances.²⁴ As part of its reflection of the Youth Festival’s emphasis on youthful self-expression, *VVV* also promoted amateur, rather than professional, musicians and other performers.²⁵ But the most striking features of *VVV* was that it was not only live, like all Soviet television at the time, but largely unscripted, and there was no special set of contestants set off from the audience as a whole.²⁶ Members of the studio audience were called up on stage at random—via the selection of seat numbers from a lottery drum, for example—to chat with the hosts and answer trivia questions for small or humorous prizes.²⁷ The show’s questions and merry tasks sometimes took up moral themes, as part of a first attempt to use television to promote “politeness, ethics, and other questions of morals,” as one internal reviewer of the show put it in 1957.²⁸ One moment, which the reviewer praised, featured a skit that showed a young man seated in a tram, while a young woman was standing; the audience pointed out the incorrectness of this behavior to the contestants on stage.²⁹

Most of the show’s questions, however, were even lighter; as the show’s staff noted, the main goal was for it to be “merry and entertaining.”³⁰ Typical questions that groups of audience members were invited on stage to answer included, for example, “which way does a cat climb down from a tree, head first or tail first?”³¹ The principle of direct audience participation extended to the television audience at home as well: the show announced contests in which any viewer at home could participate, if, for example, they had a child with the initials V.V.V. who had been born on the day of the show’s first broadcast.³² This process was, of course, unpredictable and hard to control. *VVV* was canceled after an excessively easy contest and appealing prize brought an unruly crowd of 600 to 700 poorly-dressed Muscovites into the theater.³³ Although the show’s format

²² *KVN? KVN...KVN!*, 11.

²³ Roth-Ey, “Mass Media,” 355; see also Leonid Zolotarevsky, interview with Natalia Otamas’ on Virtual’nyi muzei radio i televideniiia, http://www.tvmuseum.ru/catalog.asp?ob_no=10636.

²⁴ Parts of the following discussion are repeated from chapter 1; I have returned to them here to illustrate their connection to subsequent Soviet game shows.

²⁵ “Stenogramma letuchki rabotnikov Tsentral’noi Studii televideniiia (14 June 1957),” GARG f. 6903, op. 31, d. 3, l. 13.

²⁶ Roth-Ey, “Mass Media,” 355-356

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ “Stenogramma letuchki rabotnikov Tsentral’noi Studii televideniiia (14 June 1957),” GARG f. 6903, op. 31, d. 3, l. 13.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ *KVN? KVN...KVN!*, 10.

³² Roth-Ey, “Mass Media,” 356.

³³ For a more detailed description of these events, see Chapter 1 of this dissertation. See also Roth-Ey, “Mass Media,” 359-365.

does not initially seem particularly scandalous, its unscriptedness and invitation to regular television viewers to appear on camera were unprecedented and, ultimately, unviable on Soviet television.³⁴

Despite their risks, *VVV*'s creators and supporters praised precisely these qualities of the show, linking it to the proletarian theater movement of the Civil War era. *VVV* was described by its producers as a television "*deistvo*," the word used in the first years after the 1917 revolution to describe a new form of festive performance that would merge drama, myth, and ritual.³⁵ Among *VVV*'s central objectives was to "draw in," or "attract" [*vovlech'*]—another word drawn from the theatrical avant-garde—television viewers as direct and spontaneous participants in this new kind of performance, "organized by television," a "little piece of life that is born at that very moment, before the viewers' eyes."³⁶ The precedent in the Civil War period on which they drew most directly was the Constructivist Aleksei Gan's "mass action" [*massovoe deistvo*], set in unbounded everyday spaces, and featuring action that would be "not strictly choreographed and directed, but rather emerge spontaneously" from the masses.³⁷ Unlike the best-known mass theatrical production of this period, the Storming of the Winter Palace, Gan's mass action emphasized unscripted, spontaneous participation across a physical space too large to be taken in by any one spectator.³⁸ Looking back in his memoir on his role in creating both *VVV* and *KVN*, Muratov made the connection to Constructivism and Gan directly, calling himself a "constructor of play" [*konstruktor igry*].³⁹

Linking their programming to the tradition of early Soviet mass festivals was a powerful way for Central Television's ambitious young staff to write themselves and their new and comparatively low-status medium into the heart of thaw culture.⁴⁰ The objectives and debates of the theatrical avant-garde in the Civil War period took on new meaning during the thaw, when various groups in Soviet society were turning to the Civil War, NEP, and First Five-Year Plan periods in search of "true" Soviet culture, free from the distortions of the Stalin cult. The early Soviet experiments in amateur theater and mass festivals offered particularly useful models for the thaw since they could serve, as they had during the Civil War, as a way of celebrating social unity at a time of enormous political conflict and psychological upheaval.⁴¹ The attempt, in early Soviet mass festivals, to break the barrier between audience and stage took on renewed meaning in the context of de-Stalinization and Khrushchev's call to reengage the Soviet people in public

³⁴ More experienced colleagues at Central Television had foreseen that the show's unpredictability could lead to just the kind of scandal that in fact took place. As one staff member warned in June, 1957, "The greatest catastrophe would be if some jerk [*kakoi-nibud' merzavets*] breaks through to the microphone—then nothing could save us [*togda my s vami ni otkupimsia nichem*]." "Stenogramma letuchki rabotnikov Tsentral'noi Studii televideniia (14 June 1957)," GARF f. 6903, op. 31, d. 3, l. 47.

³⁵ von Geldern, 134-136.

³⁶ *KVN? KVN...KVN!*, 11.

³⁷ Kristin Romberg, "Gan's Constructivism" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Columbia University, 2010), 42.

³⁸ Romberg, 52.

³⁹ Quoted in E. Gal'perina, "KVN--Kak eto delalos' (ili metamorfozy Kluba Veselykh i Nakhodchivkh)," *Virtual'nyi muzei radio i televideniia*, http://www.tvmuseum.ru/catalog.asp?ob_no=8725

⁴⁰ On the low status of television and its slow embrace by the Soviet state, see Kristin Roth-Ey, "Finding a Home for Television in the USSR, 1950-1970," *Slavic Review* Vol. 66, No. 2 (Summer, 2007).

⁴¹ van Geldern, 4-5.

life.⁴²

There were, of course, many important and revealing differences between Gan's mass action and *VVV*'s *deistvo*, including the fact that *VVV*'s action took place indoors, on a stage, and with professional personnel directing the action. *VVV* also offered a version of mass action that was based on play, rather than on historical reenactment, which made the resulting spectacle's meaning even more dependent on the behavior of its participants.⁴³ Finally, *VVV*'s connection to the Youth Festival reflected another obvious change: the substitution of "youth" for "proletarian" as the key group whose spontaneous participation *VVV* was supposed to evoke. This substitution was part of a broader shift in thaw culture and politics with many causes; on the most basic level, however, de-Stalinization put "youth" in a position similar to that of the "proletariat" in 1917, as the nebulous group that both symbolized the future and was least tainted by past.⁴⁴

Still, *VVV* shared enough in common with Bolshevik mass festivals that it encountered very similar questions and problems as its producers designed and staged it. Subsequent Soviet game shows were also characterized by these tensions, or were shaped in response to them, so they bear spelling out. These included tensions between scriptedness and spontaneity, amateur and professional, and youth/proletarian and mass. The problem of eliciting forms of spontaneous expression that were acceptable to Central Television's censors arose immediately, in the problem of calibrating the show's difficulty level. At a Central Television Party meeting in early June, 1957, TV staff discussed the problem of audience members who answered extremely easy questions incorrectly. "Those present in the hall," one TV worker observed, "are very minimally, not to say badly, prepared, and they answer the most primitive questions with difficulty."⁴⁵ Yet making the questions easier was equally problematic: after the show's final broadcast, the Central Committee's reprimand to Central Television stated that the foolishness of "the questions and riddles presented to listeners made a mockery of Soviet people" [*byli ne chem inym, kak glumleniem nad sovetskimi liud'mi*].⁴⁶ In the June, 1957, meeting, one person proposed that the show ought to plant audience members who had been prepared in advance in the audience.⁴⁷ Most of those present objected strenuously to this practice as a violation of the show's principles, but the show did script and prepare

⁴² For more on this call, see Vladislav Zubok, *Zhivago's Children: the Last Russian Intelligentsia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 122-123.

⁴³ The appearance of these participants was thus a source of great anxiety for the show's producers. The director of the Central Television Studio, V. S. Os'minin, who would lose his job in the show's final scandal, worried about the appearance on camera of poorly prepared, frivolous "fifochki," women who wanted to appear on camera and thus ran up to answer questions when they did not know the answers. "Stenogramma letuchki rabotnikov Tsentral'noi Studii televideniia (14 June 1957)," GASF f. 6903, op. 31, d. 3, l. 63.

⁴⁴ Youth was, of course, an important and problematic category for the early Soviet state as well. See Anne Gorsuch, *Youth in Revolutionary Russia: Enthusiasts, Bohemians, Delinquents* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000).

⁴⁵ "Stenogramma letuchki rabotnikov Tsentral'noi Studii televideniia (14 June 1957)," GASF f. 6903, op. 31, d. 3, l. 16-17.

⁴⁶ E. Gal'perina, "KVN--Kak eto delalos' (ili metamorfozy Kluba Veselykh i Nakhodchivkh)," http://www.tvmuseum.ru/catalog.asp?ob_no=8725

⁴⁷ "Stenogramma letuchki rabotnikov Tsentral'noi Studii televideniia (14 June 1957)," GASF f. 6903, op. 31, d. 3, l. 17.

those contests that engaged the entire television audience in advance, although they still had, as the show's cancelation revealed, a lot of room for spontaneous mass performance. The problem of the difficulty of questions was also closely tied to that of the meaning and value of the show's prizes. In the June, 1957, discussion of the program one person complained that the show's minor prizes were given away too easily for silly answers to easy questions, causing the prize to lose its meaning. But another, who had traveled to the GDR and witnessed the broadcast of a similar game show there, suggested that the show should consider offering more valuable prizes like those on the GDR's show for more serious, high-quality answers.⁴⁸

The subject of the show's spontaneous action was somewhat unclear. Ostensibly a youth program, the show also aimed to unify to the entire television audience. The show's humorous, entertaining content did succeed in attracting an enormous audience, but it also lacked a consistent set of messages about the nature of Soviet "youth." In the tradition of Soviet amateur theater, *VVV* was a show whose most important meaning was to be found in the experience of participation. Like a workers' amateur theater production of a traditional play, its proponents suggested that the product itself was almost irrelevant—however foolish and entertaining *VVV* might be, its political meaning derived from the experience of unification and direct participation that it provided to viewers. Its short-lived and controversial time on Central Television made clear that, from the perspective of the Central Committee, the television spectacle that was produced also mattered, and had to offer more direct political messages. *VVV*'s final broadcast and the resulting repression meant that Central Television did not create another quiz show for two years.⁴⁹

By the spring of 1958, however, Central Television was in the process of creating a Youth Programming Desk, whose staff—led by Rudol'f Boretskii, a young TV editor trained as a philosopher who had worked on Central Television's Youth Festival programming in 1957—sought to continue the short-lived Festival programming desk's vision. The Youth Programming Desk, from the beginning, saw itself as having a special mission, as the content desk most committed to seeking out new genres and forms that best fit television's unique qualities as a medium. Elena Gal'perina, a young philologist hired to work in the new Youth Desk that spring, remembers Boretskii instructing her that television was "not newspaper, not radio, not cinema," that it had its own genres and forms and that their job was to discover them, and always to be original.⁵⁰ The Youth programming division had another key principle, based on television's intimate setting in the home: no direct [*lobovoi*] propaganda.⁵¹

This sense of a special mission, and a particular commitment to artistic and entertaining approaches to television's power to influence viewers, was reflected in the fluid and egalitarian relations among the different professional roles—author, director, and editor. Anatolii Lysenko, who began writing program scripts for the Youth Desk on a consultant basis in 1962 and was hired eight years later, remembered that "both the administrators and the young female assistants were our equals...the secret of our success

⁴⁸ The speaker mentioned televisions and tape recorders being given away, adding that "maybe that is too rich for us." *Ibid.*, l. 43.

⁴⁹ *KVN? KVN...KVN!*, 11.

⁵⁰ Gal'perina, "*KVN, Kak eto delalos* "

⁵¹ *Ibid.*; *KVN? KVN...KVN!*, 13.

was that our desk was built on the principle of collective creative work [*kollektivnoe tvorchestvo*].”⁵² At the same time, there was a high degree of deference toward those authors and directors whose work was considered to be the most imaginative and successful. “We had an understanding,” Lysenko recalled, “that there were persons called ‘creatives’ [*tvoriugi*],” whose work many of the Youth Desk’s administrators and assistants tried to facilitate. This group, which included Muratov, Vladimir Voroshilov, a director from the Taganka Theater who worked in the Youth Desk from 1969, and Lysenko, who hosted several of Voroshilov’s game shows, was also quite socially insular; Lysenko reported that he, Muratov, Voroshilov, and others spent almost all of their free time outside of Central Television drinking together and talking about their work.⁵³

Game shows were the preferred genre of these *tvoriugi*, because their mass audience and participatory format best reflected the Youth Desk staff’s beliefs about the nature of television as a medium. Despite the anxiety about the genre after *VVV*’s cancelation and the ensuing firings, Central Television staff who had worked on it or, like Gal’perina, admired it, were eager to create a new show “in the spirit of *VVV*.⁵⁴ The new Youth Programming desk’s first recurring program, *Journal “Youth,”* first broadcast in April 1958, introduced a recurring rubric as its final segment, a quiz show called “2 x 2 = 4” which was produced by Elem Klimov, who later became a well-known film director.⁵⁵ New staff were added in 1959, including several who would be involved with *KVN*, and the Youth desk began to broadcast monthly “quizzes [*viktoriny*]” from Central Television’s theater. By the fall of 1961 Muratov, together with his friends the *kapustniki* Aksel’rod and Iakovlev, had completed the first *KVN* script.⁵⁶ The show was first broadcast on November 8, as part of the special programming for the Revolution Day holiday, although it was, for its first year on Central Television, broadcast on the 2nd channel, which had a smaller range limited to the Moscow region.⁵⁷

Although *KVN* has been remembered as a direct successor to *VVV*, it was a very different program, one that responded directly to the problems and criticism *VVV* had faced. The most obvious change was the addition of a clear set of contestants—initially students at Moscow’s technical institutes—who were distinct from both the studio and television audiences. A. A. Alexeev described *KVN* in terms quite similar to those used to describe *VVV*, but with the addition of a “protagonist” [*geroi*]: “the protagonist of this *deistvo*,” he wrote, “would be a young person, our contemporary, whom television would reveal so fully, so without mediation, and, most important, so convincingly, that it could not have been the work of any other medium.”⁵⁸ As Kristin Roth-Ey has demonstrated, these new young protagonists were to provide models for emulation and a clear set of messages about the superiority of Soviet elite, male student youth.⁵⁹

⁵² A. Lysenko, interview with Irina Pchelina on Virtual’nyi muzei radio i televideniia. http://www.tvmuseum.ru/catalog.asp?ob_no=10625

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Gal’perina, “*KVN--Kak eto delalos*””.

⁵⁵ Gal’perina, “*Molodezhnaia redaktsiia*,” http://www.tvmuseum.ru/catalog.asp?ob_no=22&page=2

⁵⁶ Gal’perina, “*KVN--Kak eto delalos*””; Roth-Ey, “*Mass Media*,” 366.

⁵⁷ Gal’perina, “*KVN--Kak eto delalos*”.”

⁵⁸ *KVN? KVN...KVN!*, 11.

⁵⁹ Roth-Ey, “*Mass Media*,” 367-381.

With these new, politically meaningful contestants, *KVN* also took on directly political and civic themes, ranging from anti-bureaucratic satire to criticism of poor-quality Soviet products. The show's format was also far more structured than that of *VVV*. A contest of wit, knowledge, humor, improvisational skill, and artistic talent between two teams of students, before an audience of "fans" [*bolel'shchiki*], the show was far closer to spectator sport than mass action. The show initially featured questions and tasks that tested factual knowledge, but immediately ran into the old problem of setting a level of difficulty that would not "discredit" Soviet students by being either too hard or too easy. The show subsequently eliminated contests that focused on factual knowledge exclusively, instead focusing on skills like wit, humor, and creativity.⁶⁰ Moreover, the questions were delivered by one team to another, rather than by the program's hosts, initially well-known actors, later Aksel'rod himself along with the Central Television newsreader Svetlana Zhil'tsova, and finally, by 1964, the pairing that would last until the show's cancelation in 1972, Zhil'tsova and a student from the Moscow Institute for Railroad Transportation, Aleksandr Masliakov.⁶¹

Limiting the game's action to a small group of contestants also made possible much greater advance scripting, rehearsal, and control. Parts of each *KVN* competition retained room for improvisation, especially early on, but teams were typically prepared in advance for the show's major tasks. By the end of the 1960s, most of the show's action was scripted in advance, often by successful former "captains" of *KVN* teams.⁶² A. Men'shikov, the former captain of the Moscow Construction Engineering Institute team, remembers sitting in his apartment's kitchen with Matvei Levinton, the former captain of the First Moscow Medical Institute team, scripting the performances of rival teams together: "My team is going to come out and say thus-and-so. And yours?" "Well mine is going to cleverly answer this and that—and yours?"⁶³ The need for such advance scripting and rehearsal was enhanced by *KVN*'s focus on civic and propagandistic themes. Student satire was a far riskier field for censors than fluffy but apolitical talk about which way a cat climbs down from a tree. At the same time, the process of scripting the show was mostly in the hands of the teams themselves or, by the late 60s, of professional and semi-professional humorists, not Central Television staff. Vetting took place during rehearsals, not in the shows' *efirnye papki*, the advance scripts approved by censors before broadcast for all Central Television shows.⁶⁴ *KVN* remained live and focused on improvisation and humor, and was thus never entirely predictable. Elena Gal'perina, *KVN*'s editor, recalled a speech she gave before the show's first broadcast that revealed how much its producers relied on the self-censorship of the performers themselves. "Please don't forget," she remembers asking the teams,

that millions of eyes are looking at you; don't turn off your self-control
[*samokontrol'*]. In the course of the broadcast there may be minor mishaps

⁶⁰ Gal'perina, "KVN--Kak eto delalos'."

⁶¹ Ibid.; A. V. Men'shikov, "KVN Byloe i dumy," on Virtual'nyi muzei radio i televizionii, http://www.tvmuseum.ru/catalog.asp?ob_no=10516.

⁶² Roth-Ey, "Mass Media," 368-369.

⁶³ A. Men'shikov, "KVN: Byloe i dumy," http://tvmuseum.ru/catalog.asp?ob_no=10516

⁶⁴ *KVN*'s *efirnye papki* included only the introductory remarks of the show's hosts and a description of the contests in which teams would compete, not the team's skits, jokes, songs, or other responses.

[*nepoladki*]—we are on live television, respond to them calmly. To the teams and the Captains a special request—observe the rules of linguistic security [*rechevoi bezopasnosti*] and remember that we, those who produced this show, want to come to work again tomorrow. Good luck to you!⁶⁵

Despite these exhortations to “self-control,” however, the show’s satire frequently resulted in its producers being called onto the carpet by the *Gosteleradio* leadership and the Central Committee.⁶⁶

In this regard, *KVN* was part of broader trends in Soviet media during the thaw. Like the journalists working for Aleksei Adzhubei at the Soviet newspaper *Izvestiia*, with whom they were in close contact, Central Television’s Youth Programming staff sought to identify and celebrate new, post-Stalin Soviet heroes.⁶⁷ In doing so, they articulated a vision of socialism that was intended to mobilize Soviet citizens toward the construction of communism and their own transformation into model persons. Their version of socialism and its heroes often diverged from that of some high-level Soviet authorities, but was licensed and encouraged by others.⁶⁸ The show also reflected thaw developments in the Soviet theater and comedy stage, including the very public return of satire, humor, and performers linked to the myth of criminal, Jewish Odessa before and after the 1917 revolution.⁶⁹ *KVN*’s prominent Jewish team members and captains and its use of Odessa-inflected humor occupied a similar, semi-licensed place in Soviet media culture.⁷⁰

More broadly, the show’s skits and contests reflected the high expectations and enthusiasm for science of the 1960s. One contest, called BRIZ, for *Biuro po Ratsionalizatsii i Izobretatel’stu* [Office for Rationalization and Inventiveness], asked the teams to imagine utopias or outline sweeping reforms.⁷¹ These contests asked the teams to imagine building a new form of transportation or a student city on the moon, taking over the portfolio of the Ministry of Higher Education for 24 hours to improve the work of Soviet universities, or just taking over the planet and telling the audience how they would transform it.⁷² In answering, the teams usually interpreted the tasks freely

⁶⁵ Gal’perina, “*KVN*—Kak eto delalos’.”

⁶⁶ Roth-Ey, “Mass Media,” 369.

⁶⁷ The youth redaktsii made a documentary film based on one of the journalist Anatolii Agranovskii’s essays. Gal’perina, “Molodezhnaia redaktsii” http://www.tvmuseum.ru/catalog.asp?ob_no=22&page=3. Adzhubei appeared on television as well. See Zubok, 153.

⁶⁸ See Zubok, 140-145; Wolfe, 33-70.

⁶⁹ For Odessa’s role on *KVN*, and more on the myth of Jewish Odessa in Soviet culture, see Jarrod Tanny, “City of Rogues and Schnorrers: The Myth of Old Odessa in Russian and Jewish Culture,” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2008), 317-322.

⁷⁰ A. Men’shikov reports that the Chief Editor of the Youth Programming Division in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Valerii Ivanov, was attacked at a meeting of the *Gosteleradio* leadership about the prominence of Jewish players on *KVN*, with “remarks of the type, ‘what kind of program are you making? You have one captain named Bromberg, and the other is Fromberg!’” Men’shikov claims that Ivanov replied “But we also have a captain Men’shikov!” Men’shikov, “*KVN*: Byloe i dumy,” http://tvmuseum.ru/catalog.asp?ob_no=10516. Kristin Roth-Ey also mentions the anti-Semitism of the Party leadership (and of Sergei Lapin in particular), as a very likely cause of *KVN*’s cancelation in 1972. See Roth-Ey, “Mass Media,” 375 n. 143.

⁷¹ Roth-Ey, “Mass Media,” 368.

⁷² For the “new form of transportation” contest see *KVN*-64, “Romantiki,” viewed by the author at the

and lightly, as opportunities for satirical humor, rather than the presentation of serious proposals.⁷³ *KVN*'s humorous answers to these kinds of ambitious, utopian tasks helped defuse the show's message about the political aspirations of the young Soviet technocracy. Yet it is reflective of the kind of energy the show unleashed, in its early years, that the BRIZ contest was often followed by "merry production gymnastics" [*veselaia proizvodstvennaia gimnastika*] for the studio audience, set to music and intended to relax the audience after the "excitement" [*pod''em*] of this particular peak of the competition.⁷⁴

Although *KVN*'s content is unfailingly fascinating and fun, I want to focus on another aspect of the show, the one that provided the frame in which this kind of satirical, utopian play could take place: its form. *KVN* continued to be presented as a form of media mass festival, and retained a direct connection to Soviet amateur theater via its writers and performers and also via its enormous popularity as an activity in schools, camps, factory clubs, and other settings.⁷⁵ But its most important innovations were those that linked it to a different model for the Soviet game show: not mass action, but spectator sport.

***KVN* as sport**

As the above discussion suggests, the most dramatic differences between *KVN* and *VVV* were the introduction, in *KVN*, of the language and structures of sport. Each broadcast was a match divided into individual "contests" [*konkursy*], rather than simply "questions." The show was thus occasionally compared to the Olympics: like Olympic events, the show's individual contests each focused on a different skill set—knowledge, wit, musical talent, improvisation.⁷⁶ But it was the language and organization of another kind of sport—soccer—that most pervaded contemporary and retrospective accounts of the show.

KVN's structure was closely modeled on soccer; Muratov in fact described it as "intellectual soccer."⁷⁷ Instead of a quiz show featuring audience contestants selected at random, *KVN* was a contest between two "teams" of players, before an audience divided into two groups, the "fans" [*bolel'shchiki*] of each team. *KVN* teams competed for points that were tallied, resulting in final scores that were advertised and have been remembered, by former players at least, like sports scores. Like Soviet soccer after the mid 1930s, *KVN* was organized into a league, with early matches leading into playoffs, then an annual championship round.⁷⁸ The teams represented groups or institutions that could have or did field athletic teams—universities and institutes, places of work, or entire cities. *KVN* also faced, I will argue, many of the tensions underlying Soviet

Gosteleradiofond remote storage facility in Reutovo, Russia, October 11, 2006. For other contests, see Gal'perina, "KVN--Kak eto delalos'." http://www.tvmuseum.ru/catalog.asp?ob_no=8725

⁷³ In the 1964 BRIZ contest to create a new form of transportation, one team presented a new Soviet "flying turtle" car that promised to be slower than walking, as part of a satire on the quality of Soviet automobiles and, conversely, the decades-long waits to purchase them. *KVN*-64 "Romantiki."

⁷⁴ Gal'perina, "KVN--Kak eto delalos'."

⁷⁵ Roth-Ey, "Mass Media," 367.

⁷⁶ *KVN raskryvaet sekrety*, 25-26.

⁷⁷ Roth-Ey, "Mass Media," 381, 383

⁷⁸ Edelman, 57.

spectator sports, including accusations of unfair play and an amateurism that was merely a fig leaf in a game in which powerful interests and their financial resources played an increasingly important role.

The decision to model *KVN* on spectator sport may have resulted from the rivalrous feelings of the Youth Programming staff, who sought to surpass the popularity of other entertainments broadcast, but not produced, by television. “Ever since the television set colonized your homes,” a group of *KVN* editors wrote in 1966, “the magicians who light it up for you dreamed of creating a program that could compete with the best sporting events both in the quantity of viewers and the strength of emotional charge.”⁷⁹ Spectator sport was also closely linked to all the qualities that Central Television’s staff saw as essential to television’s nature as a medium during the thaw. It was spontaneous and unpredictable; its action unfolded live before the viewers’ eyes.⁸⁰ Sport also offered a ready-made model for Soviet game shows, one that was enormously popular yet could be seen, whenever necessary, as beneficial to its audience’s character and self-development.⁸¹ But it also offered television a very compelling form of entertainment, one that reflected the unpredictability and conflicts of real life, allowed for the rise of gifted heroes but also their fall, and reflected the role of both skill and luck.

Still, there was one important difference between *KVN* and soccer: *KVN* had nothing quite so clear as two poles and a net to define how and when points were scored. In this it was like gymnastics, figure skating, or boxing, all very popular sports in the Soviet Union. As in these other sports where artistry is taken into account, determining the winner of a contest of humor and wit is largely a subjective matter. Although soccer certainly has ambiguities that require the judgments of referees and league authorities above them, the rules of the game are clearly established and reasonably transparent to fans, players, and officials alike. This is much less true for sports like figure skating, which are constantly plagued by accusations of unfair judging; rules were even less clear on *KVN*, which lacked the relative clarity of double versus triple toe loops. In the course of its first few seasons, *KVN* developed a fairly regular structure of recurring contests—the ceremonial entrance of the teams and greetings to the jury, an opening warm-up of riddles and quiz questions, an improvisation contest like BRIZ, the “homework” contest, which always dealt with a social or political theme and was explicitly prepared in advance, a contests for the teams’ fans in the studio audience, and a contest between the two team captains. But the number of individual contests and the points they were worth varied greatly from show to show. What’s more, the point values assigned to each contest were not always announced beforehand, nor necessarily clarified afterward. Each contest might include points for different qualities—humor, intellect, improvisational skill—each of which was weighted differently.

Decisions about scoring were made by the *KVN* jury.⁸² The show’s hosts

⁷⁹ *KVN raskryvaet sekrety*, 22.

⁸⁰ For early theories of television’s nature that connected it to spectator sport, see Chapter 1 of this dissertation.

⁸¹ Edelman, ix-x, 57-58.

⁸² In the show’s first few years the jury was seated on stage and interacted with the players directly and frequently; by the mid 1960s they had moved to a balcony above the stage and conversed with contestants somewhat less often. I have not found an explanation of this change, but it began to be bemoaned by some members of the show’s audience and its participants, including jury members, almost immediately. See for

conversed with the jury regularly, and the jury itself was shown on camera, deliberating and delivering decisions. The jury was made up of leading members of the cultural and scientific elite, including a changing mix of journalists, TV hosts from other shows, actors, theatrical and film directors, scientists, the famous Soviet sports commentator Nikolai Ozerov, and *KVN*'s own writers and editors. They were introduced at the beginning of each match, and sometimes answered a few humorous questions to warm up the crowd—things like “when did someone first say that *KVN* was becoming boring?”—and establish their authority as judges of a comedy show. The jury's comments to the show's hosts were sometimes audible to the television audience, but their discussions prior to making a decision usually were not. Often, while they debated a decision about scoring one contest, another contest would be conducted, and several scores would be announced together. It was nearly impossible, in other words, to tell who was ahead from moment to moment, except by making one's own judgment, which might not correspond with that of the jury in the balcony.⁸³

The program's lack of clear and regular rules and procedures became a significant source of complaint from viewers beginning in the mid 1960s. Because of the relative paucity of archival sources on *KVN* before the mid 1960s, it is difficult to say for certain whether the *KVN* jury's decisions were very controversial in the show's first four years. Reports on viewer letters to the Youth Programming Desk suggest that viewers did complain about jury decisions, but only rarely, as in the case of a 1963 match that will be discussed below. Most letters in the first half of the 1960s seem to have contained praise and thanks for the show, requests for scripts and instructions for organizing local *KVN* performances, and requests that the show be broadcast in an earlier time slot, particularly from viewers in time zones that were ahead of Moscow time, where the show began at 10:00 pm.⁸⁴ Beginning in 1966, however, Central Television's monthly reports on viewer letters noted very frequent complaints about the unfairness or incompetence of the jury.⁸⁵ What had changed?

In the second half of the 1960s, *KVN* was coming under much greater pressure from *Gosteleradio*'s leadership and a whole range of other financial and political interests to include new teams and alter the rules. *KVN*'s audience had grown immensely as Central Television's network expanded. In 1966, Central Television at last was reaching all 13 of the non-Russian Soviet republics. After the opening of the Ostankino Television Center and the commencement of satellite broadcasting, both in 1967, it was reaching 50% of Soviet territory, and growing quickly. Where television viewers could watch

example, *KVN* jury member Aleksandr Svobodin's essay in *KVN raskryvaet sekrety*, 268-270.

⁸³ *KVN*-64, “Romantiki,” viewed by the author at the *Gosteleradiofond* remote storage facility in Reutovo, Russia, October 11, 2006.

⁸⁴ Viewer letter reports in Central Television's archive are sporadic and incomplete before the mid 1960s. I did not find complaints about *KVN*'s jury prior to 1966, but memoir sources mention that these complaints began in 1963 at the latest. See for example “Obzory pisem radiosluchatelei (sovetskikh i zarubezhnykh) i telezritelei za ianvar'-mart, iul'-dekabr' 1964 g.” GARF f. 6903, op. 10, d. 58, l. 214; and “Obzory pisem telezritelei za fevral' 1965 g.” GARF f. 6903, op. 10, d. 65, l. 12-13.

⁸⁵ See for example “Obzory pisem telezriteli za ianvar'-mart i avgust 1966” GARF f. 6903, op. 10, d. 69, ll. 38, 65. The report for March notes that one-third of the letters to the show (or about 60 letters) were complaints about the jury's fairness. This kind of letter appears frequently and consistently in subsequent years; see for example “Obzory pisem telezritelei za ianvar', fevral', aprel'-sentiabr', noiabr', dekabr' 1968,” GARF f. 6903, op. 10, d. 80, ll. 12, 39a.

KVN, they did. Central Television's audience surveys consistently reported that 75% of Soviet viewers were watching *KVN*, more than any other program. With this new audience that stretched far beyond Moscow, *KVN*'s producers came under pressure to feature teams drawn from groups other than Moscow students. In the 1964-65 and 1965-66 seasons, all-city teams from Friazino and Gor'kii, respectively, won the *KVN* championship. Men'shikov remembers being informed, in the 1967-68 season, that his team would compete against a team of female workers from a textile factory for their next match. Party organizations from cities in non-Russian republics, such as Baku and Kishinev, also pushed for and received the opportunity to showcase their own teams on the show, following the precedent of Ukrainian student teams from Kiev and Odessa and city teams from Friazino and Gor'kii. These new teams were not, however, drawn from a single institute, nor were they necessarily the winners of any previous competitions. To include more teams, *KVN* also began to experiment with new formats and rules, including a special 1967 broadcast for the 50th anniversary of the October Revolution that featured many teams, including factory teams, competing simultaneously, rather than a proper "match" between two teams.⁸⁶

These new teams and formats exposed the increasing money and power operating behind the scenes of the game, raising questions, like those in Soviet soccer, about fairness and the "amateur" nature of the competition. According to Gal'perina, one such incident took place in a 1963 match between the Moscow Physical-Technical Institute [*Fiztekh*] and the Kiev Institute of Airforce Engineers. The match was judged by a jury which included several judges from Kiev. After a robot-building competition took up most of the show's allotted time, the score was tied in the show's final minutes when the Kiev team presented their competitors and the jury with a special pin they had manufactured, showing the cartoon person in the *KVN* logo wearing a pilot's cap. The jury awarded the match to the Kiev team, outraging viewers, since the pins had been manufactured at state expense, and such financial influences were not supposed to pollute the game's "gentleman's agreement."⁸⁷ One outraged viewer wrote to the Youth desk, "how can I explain this to my children, who were watching the program with me and couldn't understand why television had allowed this injustice?!"⁸⁸

One of *KVN*'s core principles was its opposition to "mercantilism"—the amateur status of its players and the absence of prizes. In a 1967 book for organizers of local *KVN* matches, the show's editor, Gal'perina, directly contrasted *KVN* with game shows in the capitalist world. "In countries where the spirit of profit [*chistogan*] rules," one discussion of the difference between *KVN* and Western quiz shows began,

[game shows] often become a kind of business, throwing unbelievable sums of prize money into the sweaty palms of their winners...In the U.S., for example, game show contestants admitted before a high court and members of Congress that they had been given the questions in advance, and had rehearsed the scenarios in which they were named winners and given significant prizes.

⁸⁶ Men'shikov, "*KVN* Byloe i dumy."

⁸⁷ Gal'perina, "*KVN*--Kak eto delalos'." Gal'perina claims that the deciding voice was that of the chess master Mikhail Tal', who convinced the jury to award an additional point for the special pins.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

“We are disgusted by the mercantilism of which many Western game shows stink,” Gal’perina continued. “Pounds, dollars, pesetas...How much more pleasant it is to play just because you are in a good mood.”⁸⁹

This official rhetoric about the show was belied by the experiences of everyone involved in producing the show or supporting a team in their local institute or city—*KVN* players were rewarded with stays in state sanatoria and other perks, and teams hired past captains and professional humorists to write their performances and paid them well.⁹⁰ In the same book for local *KVN* fans and organizers from which the previous quote was drawn, Gal’perina observed that “In *KVN*, as in soccer, ‘patrons’ have emerged...they add funds to the budget for gifts and costumes, get participants out of their coursework, accommodate them in vacation houses, creating an unhealthy, speculative excitement [*azhiotazh*] around this merry intellectual game... You watch the competitions of these teams and you ask yourself: ‘who is competing—merry and resourceful teams or economic managers [*delovitie khozaistvenniki*]?’”⁹¹ The fact that the show was now almost completely scripted was not a secret to the public either—in 1968 a former television worker-turned-scholar, Georgii Fere, organized a roundtable for the journal *Zhurnalista*, and published an account in which the fact that the show was now 95% scripted was openly discussed.⁹² Several manuals of advice for local *KVN* organizers published in 1966-67 similarly stressed the need for advance organization, rehearsal, and scripting.⁹³

By the late 1960s, *KVN* had become a stage on which all the forms of unfair play in Soviet life were visible. This was true of other fields of Soviet culture, most notably sport, but it was particularly problematic in a show (and a medium) that advertised itself as a model of transparency, participation, and fairness. “Under the microscope of the camera you cannot hide anything,” one manual for local organizers explained. “On *KVN* everything should happen in the open, and not backstage. *KVN* is an honest game.”⁹⁴ The work of the jury, whose authority and ways of reaching decisions were far from transparent, thus became a particular focus for criticism, both from viewers and from cultural elites who felt the show had lost its social purpose and become simply entertainment. One participant in Fere’s 1968 roundtable quipped that “it is hard for satire to pass the exam, since its objects often sit on the jury.”⁹⁵ Viewers objected to the jury’s decisions and challenged their authority. Fere quoted from a series of viewer letters at the *Zhurnalista* roundtable. “I cannot for the life of me understand what authority was guiding the judges when they awarded twelve points for a basically mediocre performance,” one viewer wrote. “It seems to me that [*KVN*’s] biggest problem [*samaia bol’shaya beda*] is the incompetently designed jury,” declared another. The show’s participants,” another wrote, “are more merry and inventive than those who judge them.”⁹⁶ One viewer

⁸⁹ *KVN raskryvaet sekrety*, 21.

⁹⁰ Men’shikov, “*KVN* Byloe i dumy.”

⁹¹ *KVN raskryvaet sekrety*, 256.

⁹² Georgii Fere, “Chego my zhdem ot *KVN*?” *Zhurnalista* No. 1 (January, 1968): 14.

⁹³ See for example, *KVN? KVN...KVN!*, 14-95; Elena Gal’perina and Bella Sergeeva, *KVN otvechaet na pis’ma*, Repertuar khudozhestvennoi samodeiatel’nosti (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1967), 64-68.

⁹⁴ *KVN raskryvaet sekrety*, 251.

⁹⁵ Georgii Fere, “Chego my zhdem ot *KVN*?” 13.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 15.

complained about the practice of including guest members on the jury drawn from the working classes that the show was trying to include more actively. “If there is a competition of cooks—there is a cook [on the jury]; if it is a salesman, there is a salesman...but among [these judges] we do not always find people who are merry and resourceful.”⁹⁷ Responding to these viewers’ letters, another roundtable participant, the writer and journalist El’rad Parkhomovskii, asked, “Is the jury necessary at all? Since all of these competitions take place in a packed hall and the audience reacts very actively, perhaps the next stage for *KVN* is the transfer of all the judges’ functions to the audience?”⁹⁸

These viewer complaints were especially problematic because the show’s producers presented the jury as an idealized version of another collective decision-making body, the Politburo, and the smaller Party committees that administered Soviet power below it.⁹⁹ “The *KVN* judges are a collective of equals,” one of the show’s manuals explained, “and the viewer is accustomed to respecting exactly this consensual [*soglasovannoe*], collective opinion.”¹⁰⁰ How would decisions actually be made? This manual for local *KVN* producers explained that “among the jury’s members there is always one person whose kind of work and life experience make him especially suited to this part of the show. His opinion is always asked first. And conflicts? A little bit of tact, the rejection of stubbornness [*otkaz ot upriamstva*]—and the disagreements will disappear in seconds.” *KVN*’s collective leadership, however, aspired to be transparent and representative. Members of the jury, the show’s editors explained, were “representatives of the viewers. Not experts, not gourmands, not know-it-alls—just regular viewers, who have been trusted to say that which the majority of people sitting ‘on the other side of the screen’ feel.”¹⁰¹ The first member among equals on *KVN* juries that this advice manual described was also sometimes supposed to accede to the opinion of the majority when it differed from his own, “not because he feels [his view] was incorrect, but because it would be incomprehensible to the public, and the principle that ‘we are not experts [*zнатоки*], but viewers’ would be violated.”¹⁰² The *KVN* jury was also drawn from different social and professional groups than was the real-life Politburo, groups most inclined to this kind of relationship to the public, as the show’s producers saw it. They were “scholars, writers, directors, educators, journalists. The last predominate, probably because they are used to feeling themselves to be representatives of the public in the most varied circumstances.”¹⁰³

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ One indicator that such parallels were always on the minds of the show’s participants is the story of Andrei Men’shikov’s Moscow Construction Engineering Institute (MISI) team’s debut in 1967. Anticipating that everyone would expect this new team to emphasize its youth, the team dressed up as old men, with white beards, 30s-style ties, hunched posture, and rattling coughs. Men’shikov claims that one member of the jury, the journalist and writer Iaroslav Golovanov, later told him that everyone on the jury had at first thought that they were imitating the Politburo; the MISI team then stood up straight and dramatically took off their beards, revealing their youthful faces. Men’shikov, “*KVN: byloe i dumy.*”

¹⁰⁰ *KVN raskryvaet sekrety*, 251.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² *KVN raskryvaet sekrety*, 253.

¹⁰³ Ibid, 251.

Yet as they articulated this vision of how the *KVN* jury would function, the show's producers were simultaneously forced to defend it against critics who demanded a clear set of rules that would govern the show's competition and ensure fairness in determining winners and losers. In 1966, Gal'perina and *KVN*'s director, Bella Sergeeva, published a volume entitled *KVN Answers Letters*, in which they set out to address some frequent questions and criticisms they received from viewers.¹⁰⁴ In its first pages, Gal'perina and Sergeeva published a collective letter from the "Komsomol members and Youth" of the Moscow Institute of Oil Machine Building [*giproneftemash*], in which the authors summed up the show's failure to follow transparent rules and offered suggestions for how it might do so. "We believe," the letter's authors began, "that the time when *KVN* was simply a merry improvisation without clear rules has long passed." Like any game, they argued,

"*KVN* competitions should be subordinated to clear rules. After all," they explained,

Chess, soccer, and other games have exactly this kind of rules—without them any competition loses its interest as sport. But at the moment, *KVN* matches on television are ruled by spontaneity [*stikhiinost'*]. What are the basic features of this situation? [What is needed] first: a formula for *KVN* competitions...How many teams can participate simultaneously? In our opinion, only two. But sometimes large numbers of teams compete on television. How many people can be on a team? How many members should the judging committee have? Who should be on it? How long should a *KVN* match last? What kind of lottery system should be used to organize the *KVN* tournament?...Second, the structure of the competition. In our opinion, the competition should include a mandatory program, made up of traditional elements (the team's entrance, greetings, warm-up, captains' contest and others), and a free program, made up of amateur performances and original contests. Third: judging. Every *KVN* match held so far has been judged by different systems. It is essential to decide on one judging system and establish it in the rules.¹⁰⁵

The students concluded by proposing a judging system based, like their "mandatory" and "free" programs, on figure skating, in which each judge would submit an individual score, with the final score determined by averaging the scores of all the judges.¹⁰⁶

In response to the students' criticism, Gal'perina and Sergeeva were obliged to defend the *KVN* jury on different grounds, not as an institution that perfectly represented viewers' own opinions, but as something other than a real jury, just another player in the game. "We, the show's creators," they wrote, "are not as categorically inclined as the authors of this letter. Although the Club has left its juvenile age, it is still searching."¹⁰⁷ Later in the book, in response to other letters calling for a clear scoring system, they explained why they chose not to adopt a system like that for figure skating. "It is well known how delicate a thing humor is," they began.

¹⁰⁴ Elena Gal'perina and Bella Sergeeva, eds. *KVN otvechaet na pis'ma* (Moscow: Repertuar khudozhestvennoi samodeiatel'nosti, 1967).

¹⁰⁵ *KVN otvechaet na pis'ma*, 6.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *KVN otvechaet na pis'ma*, 7-8.

Can you fit it into a standard scale? We have chosen the path of good-natured trust toward those who have been given the honorable title of member of the jury. That is just the kind of game *KVN* is! The jury makes a mistake, well, today those guys lost, tomorrow they will win!...*KVN* is an intellectual game, and the team members, fans, and members of the jury all participate in it equally.¹⁰⁸

This was the play of theater, not sport. “For me, the jury is the third partner in the show,” explained Victor Slavkin, a satirical writer and dramaturg who participated in the 1968 *Zhurnalista* roundtable. “The jury’s answers are just as interesting to me as the answers of the teams.”¹⁰⁹ This defense emphasized *KVN*’s collective, not competitive, purpose. “I’m not sure,” the critic Ia. Varshavskii added, “that we should really be making a big deal about points. Surely that is not the objective here?”¹¹⁰ Everyone was playing on the same team—*KVN* was ideally, as a longstanding jury member put it, “a conflict between good and excellent.”¹¹¹

Writing in one of the show’s advice manuals to local organizers, the *KVN* jury member Aleksandr Svobodin offered a mocking cautionary tale about a *KVN* team captain who became outraged when a jury member awarded the wrong number of points for one contest, and the captain’s team lost as a result. This captain “forgot that *KVN* is a game. He went to the jury and complained,” Svobodin reported. “And he received an answer that was far from the norms of jurisprudence: ‘Oh, give up, you’ll win next time—this is not the end of the world, nor of *KVN*. And who’s to say that in all the confusion you didn’t get an extra point too?’”¹¹² The captain kept taking his complaint to higher and higher Soviet authorities, always getting the same answer, until he finally submitted his complaint to the United Nations, from whom he was still, Svobodin wrote, awaiting a response to his request that U.N. forces invade the jury’s balcony. The *KVN* captain in this story, Svobodin suggested, was wrong for taking his own feelings of injustice too seriously, but also for believing the *KVN* jury was bound by the “norms of jurisprudence.” Yet, as we have seen, this captain was far from alone in seeking to hold *KVN* to a strict set of rules. Far from ridiculous, this demand closely resembles the arguments of Soviet dissidents who pressured the Soviet state by asking it to obey its own laws.¹¹³

By 1968 there were many competing versions of *KVN* being proposed and debated in print and viewer letters. For every account like Svobodin’s, there was one by someone like Matvei Levinton, the famous captain of the Moscow Medical Institute team. Levinton compared a *KVN* performance to the exhausting work of a surgeon, and *KVN*’s fans to the passionate partisans of the soccer stadium:

You are definitely at work. You are exhausted after a broadcast like after a good

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 73.

¹⁰⁹ Fere, “*Chego my zhdem ot KVN*,” 16.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ *KVN raskryvaet sekrety*, 265.

¹¹² *KVN raskryvaet sekrety*, 270-271.

¹¹³ See Benjamin Nathans, The Dictatorship of Reason: Aleksandr Vol’pin and the Idea of Rights under “Developed Socialism” *Slavic Review*, Vol. 66, No. 4 (Winter, 2007), pp. 630-663.

operation. And you don't get satisfaction from your witticisms or those of your opponents, because their witticisms—that's fewer points for you, for your team...The dust of battle forces not only you, but the entire audience to forget themselves...the *KVN* audience is more like fans in a stadium than respectable, theater-going society. The pressure of each *KVN* match is like the most serious soccer game.”¹¹⁴

Likewise, although hundreds of viewers wrote in complaining about *KVN*'s unfair judging and demanding clear rules, sometimes making up the majority of the show's mail, others wrote in to complain that it was becoming too rushed in the new, shorter timeslot it was confined to in 1968.¹¹⁵ Some complaints about the lack of established rules revealed other differences in how the show's creators and its viewers understood the show's purpose. Although some viewers complained that *KVN* had lost its improvisational spirit, others failed to understand why improvisational contests were worth more points than the rehearsed introductions and songs, which required so much talent and advance preparation: they saw the show as entertainment, not enlightenment, and were perfectly happy to enjoy it as a scripted comedy performance.¹¹⁶

Perhaps this is why *KVN* remained on the air for several more years—it was canceled only in 1972, having survived the serious crackdown at Central Television following the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia, and the second one that followed the arrival of Sergei Lapin as Chairman of Gosteleradio in April, 1970.¹¹⁷ Sport or theatrical play, improvisation or scripted show: none of that was crucial, at least in the short term. The show's popularity allowed it to survive numerous scandals as well as multiple changes to its basic parameters, including the move to a pre-recorded and edited broadcast.¹¹⁸ By 1971, however, *KVN*'s chief editor, Giul'bekian, and its director Sergeeva talked internally about the practical difficulties of producing the show. The

¹¹⁴ Matvei Levinton, “*KVN*,” *Sovetskoe radio i televideenie* No. 2 (February, 1968), 21. On partisanship among Soviet soccer fans and official responses to it see Edelman, 188-193.

¹¹⁵ See for example “*Obzor pisem telezritelei za 1969 god*,” GARF. f. 6903, op. 10, d. 88, l. 11a; “*Obzory pisem telezritelei za ianvar', fevral', aprel'-sentiabr', noiabr', dekabr' 1968*,” GARF f. 6903, op. 10, d. 80, ll. 12, 67-67a; “

¹¹⁶ On loss of old spirit and improvisation see for example “*Obzory pisem telezritelei za 1971 god*,” GARF f. 6903, op. 36, d. 1, ll. 7-7a, 491. Sergeeva and Gal'perina printed and responded to letters complaining about the higher point value of improvisational contests in *KVN otvechaet na pis'ma*, 63-65.

¹¹⁷ Brezhnev saw the Prague Spring as a direct outcome of actions by the mass media in Czechoslovakia; the years 1968-1970 inside Central Television were a time of upheaval, the assertion of stricter censorship and greater consequences for the programming editors [*redaktory*] responsible for signing off on the content of individual shows. These changes culminated in the replacement of Mesiatsev with Sergei Georgievich Lapin, a Central Committee member who commenced his long reign at Gosteleradio (1970-1985) by firing 10% of the Gosteleradio staff in Moscow, including 8 of 12 Chief Editors [*glavnye redaktory*], the heads of each programming division. For a more detailed discussion of the 1968-1970 crisis at Gosteleradio see Kristin Roth-Ey, *Soviet Culture in the Media Age* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, forthcoming), 338-342.

¹¹⁸ As Evgenii Ginzburg, a Youth Desk editor who went on to create the Musical lottery program Artlotto noted in 1972, even the city Party Committee in “a strict city like Ul'ianovsk” (Lenin's birthplace) did not hold meetings on evenings when *KVN* was broadcast, because they loved the show. See “*Protokol #7 otkrytogo partiinogo sobraniia Glavnoi redaktsii peredach dlia molodezhi ot 25 avgusta 1971g.*,” TsAOPIM f. 2930, op. 2, d. 16, l. 133.

greatest problem was finding and training suitable competitors: the old champions had become “ungovernable [*neupravliaemy*]” but new teams required months or years of preparation to meet the show’s standards.¹¹⁹ The impetus to cancel the show seems to have come at least as much from the show’s own staff, who were already, in 1970, suggesting that *KVN* “take a break” so they could prepare new teams and so viewers would “start to miss” the show, as it did from Lapin.¹²⁰ More broadly, however, *KVN*’s format was a poor fit for the first years of the Lapin era at Central Television; the show’s focus on civic-minded social criticism could not survive for long during a period when Central Television’s news programs were forbidden to include critical stories.¹²¹

By 1971, however, the Youth Programming Division had created several new programs. Together they suggest the fragmentation of *KVN* into several, more targeted programs, focusing on audiences and subjects that better suited the political environment of the late 1960s and early 1970s, when “ungovernable” intellectual youth could no longer be the chief protagonists of the air. Rather than showcasing Soviet intellectual youth, these new shows promoted working-class heroes or a fairly random assortment of “regular people.” They had individual contestants rather than teams, and they reduced the visibility of the jury. *KVN* had occasionally focused on consumption, taste, and beauty as some of the several spheres in which its contestants could apply their superior powers of reason and satire to improve Soviet life. Two new shows, *Auction* [*Auktsion*] (1969-1970) and *Let’s go, girls!* [*A nu-ka, devushki!*] (1970-1985) focused almost exclusively on these matters. *KVN* had been promoted as a form of intellectual sport for elite male youth, but had struggled to incorporate athletic skills into its competitions; *Let’s go, guys!* [*A nu-ka, parni!*] (1971-73) and several other shows that followed it focused on athletics and military preparedness for working-class male youth.

Most striking of all, however, was the approach these programs took to the problem of determining winners. Abandoning the model of spectator sport, with its limited role for fans in the game itself, these shows involved the audience much more actively, sometimes as participants, but especially as judges. The spheres in which their contestants competed shrank, but their form began to depart dramatically from the models familiar to Soviet audiences from sport and politics. If *KVN*’s jury had mirrored the Soviet political system in order to improve it, these shows began, tentatively, to step beyond that system entirely. These shows followed the writer and journalist E. Parkhomovskii’s suggestion, in the 1968 *Zhurnalist* roundtable on *KVN*, that, in the “next stage of *KVN*,” the functions of the jury be passed on to the viewing audience.¹²²

Auction

Directing consumption and teaching taste was one part of *KVN*’s broader objective of promoting elite Soviet youth as models of both cultured taste and active Soviet citizenship. From its earliest seasons, the show had included contests in which

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 130-132; “Stenogramma otchetno-vybornogo partsobraniia pervichnoi partorganizatsii Tsentral’nogo televideniiia, (20 November 1972)” TsAOPIM f. 2930, op. 2, d. 241, l. 17.

¹²⁰ See “Protokol #7 otkrytogo partiinogo sobraniia Glavnoi redaktsii peredach dlia molodezhi ot 25 avgusta 1971g.” TsAOPIM f. 2930, op. 2, d. 16, l. 130-132. Roth-Ey reports that Lapin had a particular dislike for the show, however. See “Mass Media,” 375.

¹²¹ See Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

¹²² Fere, “Chego my zhdem ot *KVN*,” 15.

teams criticized Soviet factories, stores, and institutions for producing flawed or unattractive products, failing to decorate their store windows tastefully, or for failing to update their representations of Soviet women to fit the greater focus on fashion in the 1960s. In one such contest, entitled “the most tasteless product,” *KVN* teams evaluated the products of several factories, selected the most “tasteless” one and wrote to the factory that produced it with their evaluation and suggestions for improvement.¹²³ More broadly, public discussions of the show occasionally drew on the language of consumer economics that gained currency during the 1960s. Matvei Levinton, the Moscow Medical Institute team captain, described the ceremonial entrance of each team as “the team’s self-presentation [*zaivka o sebe*]—it’s the “company’s sign [*vyveska firmy*].” Here the team shows its taste.”¹²⁴ But by far the most dramatic effort to create a game show that would direct consumption was a short-lived program called *Auction* that combined two of the main functions that Youth Programming staff saw for game shows in the 1960s and 70s: making television viewers participants in an entertaining, television mass festival, and instructing them in model forms of behavior.

Auction was created in 1969 on the initiative not of Central Television’s Youth Desk, but of the Soviet Ministry of Trade. As Vladimir Makoveev, the show’s cameraman, recalled, the director of Central Television, P. I. Shabanov, announced at a planning meeting that he had received a request from the Ministry of Trade to “think about a form of advertising for some consumer goods” that had excess inventory in the state distribution system.¹²⁵ The idea of using game shows in a planned economy to encourage the consumption of excess goods was another direct borrowing from Eastern European television. The GDR had created game shows for this purpose in the 1950s.¹²⁶ But in the hands of Voroshilov, a creative and ambitious television director who had also worked as an artistic producer and director at the Moscow Art Theater and the Taganka Theater, and with an extremely generous budget from the Ministry of Trade, the show that resulted was far more than a modest experiment in socialist advertising. More than anything else, the show resembled an even bolder version of *VVV*—*Auction* was also referred to as a *deistvo*—in which the audience served as both participants and judges in a game of consumer knowledge and decision-making, with valuable prizes at stake.

Auktsion was broadcast live from the “Wings of the Soviets” sports stadium on Leningradskii Prospect. In the audience, Makoveev recalled, were a “random [*sluchainaya*]” assortment of people assembled by distributing tickets to various Moscow workplaces.¹²⁷ Makoveev remembers hearing that this was at the insistence of “progressives” in the Ministry of Trade who wanted to imitate the American advertising tactic of demonstrating products to an audience of “regular people” called in off the

¹²³ For descriptions of these contests, see for example Men’shikov, “*KVN* Byloe i dumy”; *KVN otvechaet na pis’ma*, 38-39; Gal’perina “*KVN*—Kak eto delalos’.”

¹²⁴ Levinton, 22.

¹²⁵ Vladimir Makoveev, “‘Auktsiony,’ ili pervye ‘reklamnye shou’ na televidenii,” on Virtual’nyi muzei radio i televideniia, http://www.tvmuseum.ru/catalog.asp?ob_no=9200

¹²⁶ Heather Gumbert, “Split Screens?” 156-157.

¹²⁷ Makoveev, “Auktsiony.” Tickets to *Auktsion* were also given away as consolation prizes on other game shows, such as *Let’s Go, Girls*. See for example “A nu-ka devushki ot 21 fev. 1970 g.” GARF f. 6903, op. 26, d. 1193, efirnaia papka # 1039.

street.¹²⁸ Despite the show's stadium setting, however, the audience was relatively small, made up of 99 “couples”—a form of organization that reflected the *Auction*'s focus on household consumption.¹²⁹

The show's main event, as its name suggested, was an “auction” in which members of the audience “bid” on featured items by answering quiz questions. The winner was the person who gave the last answer before the third blow of the hammer. These “auctions” were interspersed with other contests for the audience in the stadium, performances by a costumed corps de ballet, musical contests featuring Soviet pop groups, and contests for the audience at home. On each broadcast, all of these activities were organized around the demonstration and promotion of a particular Soviet product the Ministry of Trade hoped to move off the shelves. The show was broadcast at least six times before it was canceled, and included episodes on tea, books, black-and-white televisions, hiking and camping vacation tours [*turism*], canned seafood, and life- and property-insurance policies.¹³⁰

Auction embodied all of the ideals of Central Television producers from the late 1950s. Not only was it broadcast live, and taped only for rebroadcast via the *Orbita* satellite system, but it was broadcast from outside the studio using a mobile broadcasting station and an unusually large number of cameras, sound operators, and 13 microphones to capture audience answers. An article about the show in *Soviet Radio and Television* portrayed the show as a live report from the scene of the game's unfolding action. The article's author narrated the show's action breathlessly: “A rapid zoom [*rezkii naezd*] captures the participant, ready to answer the host's question...[another] camera follows the host, and a fourth “hunts” for interesting reactions among the viewers...it's a chase [*idet progon*], and no one knows where the broadcast will move, from where the first answer will come from.”¹³¹ Like *VVV*, the show's creators sought to make viewers into participants, on the model of a mass festival. “We wanted to find a form of broadcasting in which the field of action would not be the stage, not the arena, but out among the viewers,” Voroshilov explained, “so that each one of them had the chance to become the hero of the television screen, to participate in the broadcast as an individual [*kak lichnost'*], to use all of his or her knowledge correctly and at the right time.” Voroshilov described the show as “an auction of knowledge,” focused particularly on regular people who “can't find the right word right away, are shy, can't improvise,” but who are nonetheless “wonderful people who know a lot and know how to think...We wanted to show these people in close up.”¹³² These were not *KVN* players, in other words, and here Voroshilov's idea both hearkened back to *VVV* and also responded to growing criticism of *KVN* from Central Television's leadership and the Central Committee for focusing

¹²⁸ Makoveev, “Auktsiony.”

¹²⁹ S. Torchinskii, “Auktsion,” *Sovetskoe radio i televideenie* No. 8 (August, 1969), 38.

¹³⁰ Anatolii Lysenko, “My s Voroshilovym dralis.’ Kak dvum legendam TV vmeste rabotalos’ i uvolnialos’,” *Novaya gazeta* No. 94 (15 December 2005), p. 37; Makoveev, “Auktsiony.” Makoveev only remembers 5 of the 6, but there are scripts for six episodes in Central Television's archive. Makoveev explains that black and white TV sets were featured because after color sets began to be manufactured on a large scale, but were still quite expensive, Soviet households ceased buying black and white sets (creating an excess of inventory) but were not yet buying large numbers of color sets either.

¹³¹ Torchinskii, 37.

¹³² Ibid., 38.

only on intellectual elites.¹³³

Auktsion offered two big innovations over *VVV*, however, in terms of how it unified the television audience. The first was the kind of knowledge the show celebrated: not light trivia facts, as in *VVV*, or scientific and technical knowledge, as in *KVN*, but consumer knowledge. As Voroshilov explained to an interviewer, “there is a certain sum of knowledge that everyone needs—an academic, a lathe operator, a student.

What kind of tea suits your taste, how to decorate an apartment, how to build a library for yourself and so forth...anyone who wishes can test his strength on “Auction”—that’s where the democratic nature [*demokratichnost’*] of our show lies.¹³⁴

Despite the fact that every Soviet person possessed consumer knowledge, there was more for them to learn. “Let’s take the example of the store “One Thousand Small Things [*Tysiacha melochei*],” explained Roman Sinitsyn, the director of Soiuztorgreklama, who appeared on the show. “Do you know what even half of the goods sold there are for? Helping people make sense of these items, teaching them to use them correctly and rationally, improving the organization of everyday life—that’s our goal.”¹³⁵

This focus on promoting consumer expertise took many of the forms familiar from Western marketing and game shows. Musical performances resembled ad jingles, and the show offered participants to gamble the items they had won for a mystery prize. There was a whole cast of characters largely unfamiliar in official Soviet culture: the “auctioneer,” a corps de ballet dressed as uniformed assistants who both danced and demonstrated the products, and “sponsors [*uchrediteli*],” including Soiuztorgreklama representatives and representatives of the featured manufacturers who presented the featured products and described them, and various “experts” who commented on the product’s qualities. The show’s tea broadcast, for example, invited viewers on stage for a blind taste-test of the handful of tea varieties for sale in Soviet stores and asked them to identify them. The show also included quiz questions about the fragrance, flavor, and healing properties of Georgian tea, for example.¹³⁶

Not surprisingly, for a show focused on advertising, *Auction* also tried to engage viewers at home. Each show concluded with a contest for television viewers, similar to those for the audience. A viewer whose letter or telegram answered the largest number of a series of questions correctly would be awarded a valuable prize, such as a television or a vacation package. Their responses had to be sent the next day and winners were announced on the following broadcast.¹³⁷ Response to the show was overwhelming: each broadcast received 20,000-40,000 audience telegrams and letters, completely disabling

¹³³ See for example the Youth Desk editor Margarita Eskina’s discussion of the need for more portraits of working class youth, in their capacity as “young owners [*molodoi khoziai*] of the country in a March 24, 1969 Party meeting of Youth Desk staff in TsAOPIM f. 2930, op. 1, d. 913, l. 122.

¹³⁴ Torchinskii, 38.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Makoveev, “Auktsiony.”

¹³⁷ See for example “Auktsion #5 Dary moria i okeana,” GARF f. 6903, op. 26, d. 1024, efirnaia papka 9315.

the Moscow postal office responsible for Central Television.¹³⁸ Viewers also suggested products to feature on future shows, sent in information about the history of the featured products, and submitted original poems and jingles.¹³⁹

Among the show's objectives was the investigation of audience tastes and preferences. As the Chief Editor of the Youth Programming Desk explained in the journal *Soviet Radio and Television*, the show's staff collaborated with the Academy of Social Sciences [*Akademiiia obshchestvennykh nauk pri TsK KPSS*] to analyze the show's mail.¹⁴⁰ This interest in learning about viewer tastes was not, however, limited to off-air analysis: it was a prominent part of the show's action as well. Each broadcast included at least one instance in which the studio audience was asked to "vote" [*golosovat'*] for its favorite among a group of related products, live on air.¹⁴¹ In the canned seafood broadcast, for example, samples of dishes made with canned prawns, calamari, shrimp, and even sea cucumber were distributed to the audience, who tasted them and then "voted" for their favorites via a special microphone that measured the loudness of their applause.¹⁴²

The applause meter, in the Soviet Union as elsewhere, offered a relatively safe way for advertisers to measure audience preferences publicly—after all, every product on display receives applause. But the outcomes of these audience "votes" were unpredictable—Makoveev recounts how, during the black and white television episode, the audience applause meter registered the "Horizon" television model, produced by a Minsk factory, as the winner.¹⁴³ "The experts in the hallways," Makoveev recalled, "called this victory completely undeserved...[since the factory's previous model had been of famously low quality], but did not protest, in order to avoid disrupting the public procedure [*publicchnaia protsedura*]."¹⁴⁴ The parallels with democratic politics are rather striking—Soviet citizens often voted (and applauded) in public settings, but never with the objective of distinguishing a single winner from among competing candidates; the image of "experts in the halls" standing aside to allow the "public procedure" to unfold without interference also has a democratic ring to it.

The show also gave viewers a very visible role in shaping the rules of the game. Unlike *KVN*, *Auction* did have clear rules, but they were changed frequently in response

¹³⁸ *Auktsion* received just over 100,000 letters in 1969. "Obzor pisem telezritelei za 1969 god," GARF f. 6903, op. 10, d. 88, l. 11; Makoveev, "Auktsiony." *Auction* was the first Soviet television show to receive tens of thousands of viewer letters in response to a single broadcast, presumably because of the chance of winning a prize; it would not be the last, however, since the use of (smaller) prizes to draw viewer letters was used by several shows in the 1970s, notably *Artloto*, which received an unprecedented 900,000 letters in 1971. See Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

¹³⁹ "Obzory pisem telezritelei za ianvar'-dekabr' 1969 god," GARF f. 6903, op. 10, d. 89, l. 61-62a.

¹⁴⁰ Torchinskii, 38-39.

¹⁴¹ See for example "Auktsion #5. Dary moria i okeana," GARF f. 6903, op. 26, d. 1024, efirnaia papka 9315; and "Auktsion #6. Gosudarstvennoe strakhovanie," GARF f. 6903, op. 26, d. 1193, efirnaia papka #719. In the latter episode audience members voted by raising their hands, rather than with applause; Makoveev reports the use of a microphone to measure applause in the television broadcast as well.

¹⁴² "Auktsion #5. Dary moria i okeana," GARF f. 6903, op. 26, d. 1024, efirnaia papka 9315.

¹⁴³ Makoveev suggests that the vote was skewed by the fact that Lysenko only let the audience know that a special microphone was registering their applause part way through the demonstration of each model; applause for the models after that point was therefore louder. Makoveev, "Auktsiony."

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

to viewer complaints about unfairness or limits on their ability to participate. The show began to allow viewers to respond to the contest by letter after complaints from rural viewers that they did not have access to a working telegraph office. It was difficult to find a fair way to allocate tickets for the show. Studio audience members received a larger share of the prizes and giveaways, but viewers far from Moscow were not able to take time off from work to travel to the show, nor could the show pay for such travel on a mass scale. In response, the show's producers mentioned in the press the possibility of inviting viewers to attend the show in Moscow in the future, but admitted that it was a serious problem that had not yet been solved.¹⁴⁵ Contests for viewers at home, however, were often won by people in quite remote parts of the USSR, such as one viewer from Iuzhno-Sakhalinsk who won a vacation package after the wilderness camping broadcast.¹⁴⁶ Viewers also objected to the simplicity of the questions relative to the high value of the prizes, and to the practice of awarding the auction's prize to the last person to speak before the third blow of the gavel. Under these rules, the person who won was not necessarily the most knowledgeable, and his victory was the result of luck.¹⁴⁷ In response, the show's staff altered the rules by having audience members "bid" by agreeing to answer larger and larger numbers of questions, the highest bidder would then come on stage and answer the number of questions he or she had bid; if enough correct answers were given, the audience member won the item, if not, they received a consolation prize.¹⁴⁸ Still, although the show remained wildly popular and many viewers praised the show as an "honest" game that put them in a "fantastic mood," others continued to object to the show's commercial subject matter and very valuable prizes.¹⁴⁹

This latter group of viewers rightly sensed that there was something not entirely Soviet about *Auction*'s open celebration of consumption and expensive prizes. Accounts of what caused the show to be canceled vary; one mentions a musical contest on the show's sixth episode, devoted to insurance policies, in which a pop group performed a song about a nuclear accident in which a group of scientists were mortally injured and then decided to live out their remaining days in luxury on the proceeds of their life insurance policies.¹⁵⁰ Another account claims that the Politburo member Mikhail Suslov attended a hockey game at which Soiuztorgreklama awarded a color television to a player who was named "best player of the game." Suslov was not pleased; he began to investigate all of Soiuztorgreklama's activities and soon shut down *Auktsion* as well.¹⁵¹ In any case, as soon as the show came to the attention of the Central Committee, its fate was sealed; every aspect of the show, it seemed in retrospect, was inadmissible on Central Television. Both Sinitsyn, the Soiuztorgreklama director, and Voroshilov were fired, although with the Youth Programming Desk's revolving door, Voroshilov was

¹⁴⁵ Torchinskii, 38.

¹⁴⁶ These winners were announced in "Auktsion #5. Dary moria i okeana," GARF f. 6903, op. 26, d. 1024, efirnaia papka 9315.

¹⁴⁷ Voroshilov mentions making this change in response to viewer complaints in Torchinskii, 38.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, see also Makoveev, "Auktsiony."

¹⁴⁹ "Obzory pisem telezritelei za ianvar'-dekabr' 1969 god," GARF f. 6903, op. 10, d. 89, ll. 61a-62; See also letters quoted in Torchinskii, 39.

¹⁵⁰ Makoveev, "Auktsiony."

¹⁵¹ Lysenko, "My s Voroshilovym dralis'."

directing another game show on a consultant basis within two years.¹⁵² Although the use of prizes to elicit viewer responses did continue on other shows, the prizes themselves became much more modest.¹⁵³

According to its producers, *Auction* was enormously successful in achieving its central goal: the stimulation of demand for overstocked Soviet products. Makoveev claimed that the show created so much demand for tea that it not only liquidated tea overstocks, but made tea a deficit item for more than a decade; the mediocre *Gorizont* television set transformed the Minsk factory that produced it into the largest television factory in the Soviet Union.¹⁵⁴ Yet the show's relatively narrow focus on consumer knowledge also limited its capacity to engage viewers in defining Soviet norms of taste and personal style. *Auction* only asked its participants to know what products were and what they were for, not how best to use them to transform oneself into a model Soviet person, worker, consumer, and family member.

Paradoxically, two shows that did address these core propaganda tasks directly, *Hello! We're Looking for Talents* [*Allo! my ishchem talanty*] (1965-1972) and *Let's Go, Girls!* [*A nu-ka, devushki!*] (1970-1985), also ceded much more authority to viewers in determining the show's winners and losers. Both were, like *KVN*, talent contests that aimed to demonstrate the superiority and well-roundedness of Soviet youth. If *KVN* had presented elite male students whose talents extended to every sphere of Soviet life—science, history, music, humor, civic leadership—*Hello!* and *Let's Go, Girls!* focused on subsets of Soviet youth who were portrayed as well-rounded within a more circumscribed field. *Hello! We're Looking for Talents* was a contest for amateur singers, and described their path from obscurity to careers as professional musicians; *Let's Go Girls!* featured young women drawn from professions in which women predominated, such as tram drivers, bakers, and telephone operators. Both of these game shows focused on crucial arenas of Cold War competition with the West—musical taste, economic productivity, consumption, gender roles, and the nature of the working class that was supposed to rule in the Soviet Union—that were less problematic than the “ungovernable” intellectual youth featured on *KVN*. Neither was broadcast live, and they were both created in response to pressure from the Central Committee, which became particularly intense after the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia, to focus on Central Television's growing provincial, working class audience, rather than on Moscow elites. Yet they also offered viewers an extremely dialogic and democratic model of decision-making, in which the audience helped shape the rules of the game and audience votes determined winners and losers.

Hello! We're Looking for Talents

¹⁵² Ibid.; Makoveev, “Auktsiony”; A. A. Grabel’nikov, *Zhurnalisty XX Veka: liudi i sud’by* (Moscow: Olma Press, 2003), 691.

¹⁵³ The program Artloto, discussed in Chapter 4, offered viewers autographed photos, records, and record players and received hundreds of thousands of letters as a result. There were exceptions to the modesty of the prizes, however, on local stations. A Leningrad show called “Glory [*slava*]” that focused on model workers was criticized in a 1971 article for offering luxurious prizes, like vacation packages, refrigerators, even pianos and boats. Tatiana Marchenko, “V Leningrade takaia peredacha...” *Televidenie, radioveshchanie* No. 4 (April, 1971), 20.

¹⁵⁴ Makoveev, “Auktsiony.”

Hello! We're Looking for Talents was a musical contest program first broadcast in 1965. The show was a musical talent contest, reworked in 1969 as an annual tournament for young, amateur performers, drawn from non-elite backgrounds, who competed on the show for a recording contract with the Soviet record label, *Melodia*. In this form, it quickly became nearly as popular as *KVN*, as far as we can tell from Central Television's limited sociological surveys of audience viewing habits.¹⁵⁵ Beginning in 1970, the show included broadcasts from cities all around the Soviet Union; in the 1970 season the winners of an all-Union semi-final were then invited to compete against the victors of a Moscow semi-final in a championship round during the New Year's holiday. Although the show was intended to portray its contestants as regular Soviet young people, stressing the well-roundedness and high cultural level of Soviet youth, it also tracked the progress of its participants from humble origins to music industry stardom.¹⁵⁶ In one 1970 broadcast, the show's host, the same Aleksandr Masliakov who hosted *KVN*, introduced one returning competitor by saying, "I'm going to introduce you as "a soldier from Kaliningrad," although I know your place of residence has changed. How did that happen?" The competitor answered that he had been invited to join the Gomel' Philharmonic Orchestra as a professional singer.¹⁵⁷

The chance to become a professional pop musician was an extremely valuable prize, and the show included discussions about who should determine the lucky winner and how. The question of who could become a contestant was particularly controversial; viewers complained in the press that there was not a clear pathway onto the show for every viewer who wanted to compete. Although the show filmed remotely from regional cities beginning in 1970, it was still far from accessible for most would-be music stars. The show's audition process was likewise closed to rock groups, although it did feature the tamer Soviet pop vocal-instrumental ensembles. Making the audition process more transparent and accessible was largely a logistical and financial problem, but it was one that plagued the show and revealed the unequal distribution of opportunity across Soviet territory.¹⁵⁸ In 1971, *Komsomol'skaia Pravda* published a letter from a viewer named Liuba Mironova complaining that she could not audition. Although Masliakov began announcing how to apply to audition at the beginning of each show, the authors of a letter report on the show's mail observed that "unfortunately, the procedure for selecting

¹⁵⁵ In a 1972 survey of weekend viewing habits based on a nation-wide sample of 3000 urban and rural viewers, roughly 80% of those surveyed reported watching *Hello! We're Looking for Talents*, placing the show just behind *KVN* and a popular scientific show called *In the world of animals [V mire zhivotnykh]*. "Subbotnie i voskresnye peredachi 1 programmy tsentral'nogo televideniia (Analiz printsiipov programmirovaniia i issledovaniie auditorii)," GARF f. 6903, op. 48, d. 115, l. 14.

¹⁵⁶ As a 1969 report noted, the Youth Desk was seeking to "strengthen the documentary basis of the already-popular program, to talk more about the people who, in addition to their main work enjoy art and music as a hobby. These shows should demonstrate the many-sidedness [*raznostoronnost'*], the high cultural level of Soviet youth." "Protokol #12 zasedaniia Komiteta i materialy k nemu," GARF f. 6903, op. 1, d. 1015, l. 49.

¹⁵⁷ Footage viewed at the Gosteleradiofond storage facility in Reutovo, Russia, October 2006.

¹⁵⁸ The show's efforts to include contestants and respond to regular viewers from the regions was also complicated by censorship rules forbidding the mention of the location of any Soviet military facility. In March, 1971 the show was reprimanded for mentioning the existence of military personnel in several Soviet cities. GARF f. 6903, op. 32, d. 5, l. 8.

contestants is not yet completely resolved.”¹⁵⁹

The question of how to select a winner from among the contestants was equally problematic. The show had always featured a jury composed of a changing mix of the Chief Editor of the Youth Desk, Valerii Ivanov, a representative of *Melodiia*, and famous professional composers and performers, including M. Tariverdiev, M. Kristalinskaia, Ia. Frenkel’, and M. Fradkin, among others. Viewers had long complained about the biased [*neob’ektivnye*] decisions of the jury, just as they had with *KVN*, but in 1970 the show began to respond to these charges.¹⁶⁰ The first step the show’s organizers took, in March 1970, was to introduce a contest inviting show’s studio audience to evaluate the contestants and pick a winner. Masliakov distributed surveys [*ankety*] to the audience, and explained that those viewers “whose opinions coincide with the opinion of the jury [would] be invited, *in their capacity as the most objective viewers*, to attend the all-Union final on June 21.”¹⁶¹ This kind of audience “survey” had a clearly didactic slant. It encouraged audience members to produce opinions that matched an “objective” evaluation by the professional jury. It also introduced a tactic that was used widely in other television musical contests in the 1970s: structuring the contest in such a way that viewers were encouraged to express views that did not necessarily coincide with their own personal preferences.¹⁶² The prize, after all, went to the person who expressed opinions most similar to the jury’s, inviting viewers to anticipate the jury’s thinking. The first winners of this contest were announced in the March 26, 1970 broadcast. They were two audience members described as an “engineer-economist” and a “student at the Moscow State Pedagogical Institute,” but there was also a third winner, an employee [*sluzhashchii*] of a household chemical factory, whose survey had simply stated that they were all good, but had different repertoire; without any special musical education, she could not say who had sung better. She, too, was awarded tickets to the final since the jury felt that the audience at the final should include not only “connoisseurs of music, who are somewhat objective [*iskushennye v muzyke, predel’no ob’ektivnye*],” but also “the most well-intentioned [*blagozhelatel’nye*] viewers.”¹⁶³

The show also sought to engage viewers at home more directly with both the jury and the contestants. Masliakov began to read a few viewer letters on air, often critical ones, and ask the jury to respond.¹⁶⁴ Viewers were also invited to send questions for the performers, generally trivial fan questions about their backgrounds and tastes. One episode included filmed footage of the viewers asking these questions themselves. Even when viewers had not submitted the questions, the show suggested that they were selected by a higher authority than simply Central Television’s editors: pure chance. In a show presented as a report from the contestants’ hotel the day before the all-Union final, Masliakov had the performers draw questions from a lottery drum. In fact, of course, the questions that made it into the drum had been culled by the show’s editors: more problematic questions like “what foreign countries have you visited?” “what is your

¹⁵⁹ “Obzory pisem telezritelei za 1971 god,” GARF. f. 6903, op. 36, d. 1, l. 6.

¹⁶⁰ See for example “Obzor pisem telezritelei za 1969 god,” GARF f. 6903, op. 10, d. 88, l. 11.

¹⁶¹ The contest was first introduced in March, but this explanation of the rules is from *Allo! My ishchem talanty*, 26 April 1970, GARF f. 6903, op. 26, d. 1193.

¹⁶² See the discussion of *Song of the Year* in chapter 4 of this dissertation.

¹⁶³ *Allo! My ishchem talanty*, 29 March 1970, GARF f. 6903, op. 26, d. 1193.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

weight?” and “what is your favorite perfume?” were crossed out in the broadcast’s script, in favor of questions like “what is your favorite color?”¹⁶⁵

The second half of the 1970 season was devoted to selecting semi-finalists from Moscow to compete in the show’s New Year’s conclusion against the winner of the June all-Union semi-final. Here the show began to move further toward including the studio audience and viewers at home in the show’s selection process. In one show in the early fall, the show periodically cut to a group of telephone operators, who were ostensibly tallying viewer votes and reporting back to the studio on their opinions.¹⁶⁶ In the next broadcast, on October 5th, the telephone operators were included in the jury, implicitly representing the viewer opinions they had recorded in the previous broadcast. Masliakov jokingly interviewed them about whether it was more difficult to connect viewers to the show and record their votes or to serve on the jury themselves.¹⁶⁷

What happened next reveals the extent to which the show’s experiments with audience “voting” were being closely monitored and controlled. The show’s script called for members of the studio audience to decide which of the contestants would go on to compete in the Moscow semi-final. This time there was no indication that their goal was to match their choices to those of the jury. After the contestants’ performances, the script had Masliakov announce that “everyone has a copy of our program’s logo. Please raise your hands for...” The camera was to show the studio audience, who would raise their hands for their choice as Masliakov read each name, reminding them that “you can only give your vote to one soloist” and moving about the studio, conducting interviews asking viewers to explain their choices as the votes are tallied. Here, however, we can see the pencil mark of the censors who intervened: the stage direction “viewers vote by raising their hands,” is crossed out and “viewers turn in their surveys” is written above. Either the show’s own editors or the Glavlit censors who reviewed each television script before air had stepped in to prevent the appearance of a multi-candidate election of sorts on Central Television. They did not object to a staged “vote” by Moscow television viewers that followed. “You’ve all seen, respected television viewers,” the script called for Masliakov to say, “that the largest number of hands were raised for two performers, _____ and _____. They can either both go to the final, or only one of them can. Television viewers will decide. Let us turn to the voting of Moscow television viewers.” The show’s script called for the broadcast to cut to a mobile television station broadcasting a panorama of lighted apartment windows. Masliakov’s off-camera voice announced “Whoever thinks that both winners are worthy of going to the final, please turn off your lights.” After asking viewers to go to their light switches, the stage directions indicate that “we see how the light goes off in the building’s windows.” The script called for the camera to return to the studio and Masliakov, standing by the monitor, to announce that “television viewers are in agreement with our viewer jury.”¹⁶⁸ This light switch “election,” with its public, unanimous voting, was far less threatening than the idea of a public, multi-candidate vote in the studio audience, not least because it

¹⁶⁵ *Allo! My ishchem talanty*, 15 June 1970, GARF f. 6903, op. 26, d. 1193.

¹⁶⁶ *Allo! my ishchem talanty* 5 october 1970, GARF f. 6903, op. 26, d. 1194, efirnaia papka 6882.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

resembled the unanimous elections that were a familiar part of Soviet life.¹⁶⁹

In the 1971 season, however, the show began to use studio audience voting to directly determine the winners on a regular basis. This outraged some viewers, who felt strongly that decisions about musical taste should remain in the hands of professional judges. G. B. Massalitinova, a professional musician from Voronezh, wrote that “Of course, democracy is a fine thing, but you should not base the evaluation of the contestants’ artistic accomplishments, the quality of their performances, on the opinion of 300 people, most of whom are incompetent...the decisions of this “mass jury” are incomprehensible. A contest is a contest. It is necessary to consult with the masses [*sovietovat’sia s massami*], but the jury should consist of professionals.”¹⁷⁰ In response to a January 1971 broadcast in which military academy students were in the studio audience, another viewer wrote “Do you really think military academy cadets can correctly evaluate the level of mastery in the performance of a popular song?”¹⁷¹

Hello! We’re Looking for Talents served as a forum, both on screen and off, in its changing rules, its viewer mail and its scripts edited by Central Television’s censors, for negotiations over how much power the audience should have in shaping Soviet popular music. Staging audience votes and making negotiations between audiences and a professional jury a central theme of the show offered a powerful way to engage viewers in articulating Soviet norms of taste and style: having a studio audience select the winners of a musical contest was one way to both demonstrate and ensure that the products of the very circumscribed official Soviet popular music industry were also popular with audiences. It seemed to offer assurance that the soloists and vocal-instrumental ensembles who won and went on to produce and distribute records with *Melodiia* could provide a real alternative to Western popular music, at least for those viewers who were willing to play the game at all.¹⁷² Yet they also provided a model for making collective decisions that fit only awkwardly into the hierarchically and didactically structured fields of Soviet culture, as letters like Massalitinova’s suggested, or into Soviet political culture more generally.

Hello! We’re Looking for Talents was canceled in 1972, after Masliakov and other members of the show’s production team were caught taking money to host amateur productions of *Hello!* at factories and other institutions.¹⁷³ But similar musical contest shows were quickly introduced both in the Youth Desk, including a nearly identical show called *Young voices* [*Molodye golosa*] in 1973, and in the Musical Programming Desk,

¹⁶⁹ On the other hand, since this viewer “vote” took place in the home, rather than in a special ceremonial setting, and its subject was a trivial question of musical taste, it could also be read as parodic. In either case, however, it was a spectacle designed to demonstrate television’s power to unify the Soviet population more powerfully and instantaneously than the traditional methods of Soviet agitation and political work.

¹⁷⁰ “Obzory pisem telezritelei za 1971 god,” GARF f. 6903, op. 36, d. 1, l. 6a.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² For more on the fluid spectrum of sanctioned, semi-sanctioned, and banned popular music in the post-Stalin Soviet Union, see David MacFadyen, *Red Stars. Personality and Soviet Popular Song, 1955-1991* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2001); and Richard Stites, *Russian Popular Culture: entertainment and society since 1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

¹⁷³ This fact was discussed at the November 20, 1972 meeting of the Gosteleradio Collegium. See Valerii Ivanov’s comments in the “Stenogramma otchetno-vybornogo partsobraniia pervichnoi partorganizatsii Tsentral’nogo televideiniia,” TsAOPIM f. 2930, op. 2, d. 241, l. 16.

which created a series of musical contest programs in the early 1970s.¹⁷⁴ In at least one case, former Youth Programming Desk staff moved to the Musical Programming Desk and created contest-based programs there that took *Hello! We're Looking for Talents'* experiments with viewer voting much further.¹⁷⁵ These shows were part of a larger flourishing of contest-based programming on Central Television at the beginning of the 1970s.

Paradoxically, this flourishing of contest programs, and especially of contest formats that included audience “voting” or other feedback, took place just at the moment when a new Chairman of Gosteleradio, Sergei Lapin, was cracking down on the more heterodox initiatives of Central Television’s ambitious journalists, directors, and editors. But in fact the game shows’ surprisingly proto-democratic set of rules and relationships fit the political circumstances of the Lapin era at Central Television quite well. In a series of speeches after his arrival in April, 1970, Lapin criticized Central Television’s authors, directors, and editors for focusing too exclusively on Moscow intelligentsia elites; among his first acts was to shut down the weekly news review *News Relay* [*Estafeta novostei*], which had featured Soviet journalists and other enlightened, reform-oriented cultural workers and artists in very prominent roles.¹⁷⁶

Instead, programs should reach out to the rural and provincial television viewers that Central Television was now reaching, with programs that were relevant to their lives and helped encourage them to greater efforts in their productive work. This meant entertainment that put them in a good mood, heroes that looked like them, and cheerful, engaging representations of a “Soviet way of life” that was superior to Western life in its emotional and moral characteristics, rather than its material conditions. Lapin criticized Aleksei Kapler, the host of a popular show about the Soviet film industry called *Cinepanorama*, for offering to television audience as positive role models a group of students at the All-Union State Institute of Cinematography. “In effect,” Lapin argued, “this was a call to young people to choose a profession in the film industry,” despite the fact that only a handful of Soviet people could enjoy such careers.

We have a countless number of programs about actors, directors, singers, already famous ones or those just achieving fame. Does this not influence young people’s imaginations, especially those who live far from the city?.... Yes, comrades, there was a time when even the most famous actors in our country could only envy the fame of [model workers like] Pasha Angelina and Mariia Demchenko. Our press and radio have somehow forgotten how to create fame for the best people in the country, the real heroes, those who create material wealth, those who feed, dress, shoe, and arm the country.¹⁷⁷

Reorienting Central Television’s content toward a provincial, non-elite audience did not mean abandoning the goal of entertaining television viewers, however. Television and

¹⁷⁴ These programs are discussed in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

¹⁷⁵ This was the case with Evgenii Ginzburg, a Youth Desk employee who created the Musical Programming Desk game show *Artloto*.

¹⁷⁶ See Chapter 3 of this dissertation for the impact of Lapin’s arrival on the News Desk.

¹⁷⁷ “Doklad i stenogrammy vystuplenii v preniiakh na sobranii partiinogo aktiva ob itogakh iiul’skogo (1970g) plenuma TsK KPSS,” TsAOPIM f. 2930, op. 1, d. 1097, l. 18.

radio were still obliged, Lapin noted, to provide programming for the Soviet people's leisure time. What were needed, however, were shows suitable to the tastes and political views of this non-elite audience. "We need musical-entertaining programs, and humor, and satire," Lapin explained, "but that doesn't mean we need to follow foreign tastes, Western fashions and performance styles." Central Television's vast rural and provincial audience were less enamored of Western popular musical styles, Lapin claimed, basing his assertions on viewer letters¹⁷⁸

Game shows, particularly those that engaged the audience as judges, were uniquely suited to meeting these objectives. Game shows were highly entertaining and popular with viewers of all ages and social groups. Despite the fact that they had originally been borrowed from Eastern European precedents, they were regarded within Central Television, as we have seen, as deeply original and distinctly Soviet in their orientation toward enlightening viewers. They offered a way for Central Television staff to feature regular people as heroes, while demonstrating, as only thousands of viewer letters could, that they were succeeding in entertaining the largest possible audience.¹⁷⁹ Shows like *Auction* and *Hello! We're Looking for Talents* had demonstrated how game shows could direct consumer demand, define Soviet norms of taste, and promote Soviet popular music. All of these were important propaganda objectives throughout the Cold War, but they were especially crucial during détente, when the easing of military and diplomatic competition increased the stakes in soft, cultural arenas.¹⁸⁰ Game shows also fit within a larger turn toward competition as in Soviet economic life, most visible in the campaign to promote "socialist competition [*sotsialiticheskoe sorevнование*]" within and between Soviet farms and factories. Competition was envisioned as a way of inspiring greater economic productivity in the absence of enthusiasm for the system, material incentives, or the threat of violent coercion.¹⁸¹

Let's Go, Girls!

Game and contest shows were also a flexible genre that could be altered to fit the political requirements of the day. The most striking example of this flexibility was *Let's Go, Girls!* [*A nu-ka, devushki*], a show created by *KVN*'s editor Marat Giul'bekian and the Youth Desk director A. Akopov, along with *Auction*'s editor I. Gavrilova, in 1970, just before Lapin's arrival. *Let's Go, Girls!* met all of the criteria Lapin set forth for Central Television in 1970. It was entertaining and popular, but its contestants were working-class young women, not *KVN*'s elite male students whose place on television was so problematic after 1968. If *Hello! We're Looking for Talents* could be criticized for

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., l. 16.

¹⁷⁹ Letters addressed to each program broadcast by Central Television, along with analysis of the reasons why letter totals were low or high, rising or falling, suggests the importance of quantity in viewer response to individual shows. Shows that did not receive significant mail were criticized in these reports, and sometimes canceled, potentially as a result of the lack of viewer letters. In internal Party meetings, television staff were praised for creating shows that elicited a large response. See for example "Protokol #4 otkrytogo partsobraniia Glavnoi redaktsii muzykal'nykh programm Tsentral'nogo Televidenia (Jan. 29 1975), TsAOPIM f. 2930, op. 2, d. 864, l. 14.

¹⁸⁰ See David Caute, *The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy During the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 3-6.

¹⁸¹ For the origins of this strategy in the Stalin era see Siegelbaum, *The Politics of Productivity*; and Shlapentokh, "The Stakhanovite Movement: Changing Perceptions over Fifty Years."

encouraging unrealistic dreams of a professional music career, *Let's Go, Girls!* aimed to promote less prestigious, working professions, like nursing or selling clothes in a store. The show was designed to perform a function something like *Auction*'s for overstocked consumer goods—it was intended to attract young women to “unprestigious [neprestizhnye]” jobs that were “urgently needed” in the Soviet economy.¹⁸² The show promoted these professions by stressing the mastery and diverse skills they required, presenting them as cultured work for fully developed people. On *Let's go, Girls!*, an internal report noted, “there is a special emphasis on the independent, creative nature of [the featured kind of] work, its importance and meaning, the necessity of being a literate and well-rounded person.”¹⁸³ Despite this echo of *KVN*'s mission, *Let's Go, Girls!* presented its contestants' skills as very specialized. Far from encouraging its contestants to imagine themselves running the planet for a day, it encouraged them to excel in these “essentially female” professions.¹⁸⁴ What is more, the largest part of the show's action focused on skills that were not related to women's work but to their roles in the family and the home.

Let's Go, Girls! took its name and musical sign-on from a song by Isaak Dunaevskii from the movie *The Rich Bride* [Bogataia nevesta], a 1938 musical comedy directed by Ivan Pyr'ev.¹⁸⁵ Like the song's chorus, which began with the words “Let's go, girls!/ Let's go, beauties!” the show was created as a Soviet version of a beauty contest. The Soviet femininity it promoted had very little in common, however, with that of the late 1930s collective farm musical.¹⁸⁶ The contestants were to represent the modern Soviet woman of the 1970s, someone who was attractive, stylishly dressed, cheerful, enthusiastic, and a skilled housekeeper: the “image of the ideal bride,” as one Central Television staffer remembered. As a 1973 report on “questions of aesthetic education [vospitanie]” in the Youth Programming Desk's programs explained,

Viewers see representatives of the most common and widespread professions. The

¹⁸² Aleksandr Vasinskii, “Vsepronikaiushchii i tysiachelikii. Zametki vladeltsa televizora,” *Zhurnalist* No. 5 (May, 1976), 49; “O propagande sistemy professional'no-tehnicheskogo obrazovaniia v glavnoi redaktsii programm dlia molodezhi TsT (November 1977)” GARF f. 6903, op. 32, d. 781, l. 63.

¹⁸³ “O propagande sistemy professional'no-tehnicheskogo obrazovaniia v glavnoi redaktsii programm dlia molodezhi TsT (November 1977)” GARF f. 6903, op. 32, d. 781, l. 63-64.

¹⁸⁴ “A nu-ka, devushki!” *Sovetskoe radio i televideenie* No. 6 (June, 1970), 23.

¹⁸⁵ The song was entitled “Let's keep going, going, merry girlfriends! [Idem, idem, veselye podruagi],” and its chorus was “Let's go, girls! Let's go, beauties!/ Let the country sing about us/ and with a ringing song let everyone worship/ our names among the heroes!”

¹⁸⁶ In post-Soviet memoirs and interviews, Youth Desk personnel often stress the show's uniquely Soviet, non-commercial, and enlightening qualities, in strong contrast with the values represented in capitalist beauty contests. The Anatolii Lysenko, a Youth Desk editor and host of *Auction*, recalled that the show's focus was not on beauty but on professionalism and intellect. Interview with Irina Pchelina, <http://ftv.msu.ru/index.php?mode=news&id=158>. Andrei Men'shikov makes a similar claim in “Za kadrom. Televizionnye baiki proshlogo veka,” on www.tvmuseum.ru, http://www.tvmuseum.ru/catalog.asp?ob_no=10698. “It was our Soviet answer to their various beauty contests,” Men'shikov recalled. “What do they have anyway—swimsuits, all very systematic [Ну, что там – купальники, да сиськи-масиськи!]. But we have professions, and erudition, and much more...” Notably, both Men'shikov and Lysenko neglect to mention the very prominent consumption and homemaking contests that were also a key feature of the show, which fit less well with the idea of a superior, enlightening Soviet beauty contest.

[Youth] desk's task is to show the attractive side of their everyday work. This is done not only via questions relating to their profession...[but also by showing] how the contestants are dressed, how they conduct themselves, how they love good songs; viewers see an example that they can imitate.¹⁸⁷

The contestants' images were thus carefully calibrated. Their clothing was provided by the show in at least one instance, in which the girls wore dresses designed by Mikhail Zaitsev, the leading Soviet fashion designer.¹⁸⁸ This level of attention to detail was warranted because the contestants were intended to serve as role models for Soviet women whose decisions about consumption, taste, and personal style carried great political significance during the Cold War.¹⁸⁹ As one internal report explained, the show may have been narrowly focused on helping young women choose a profession, "but in the best broadcasts of this [show], a much greater effect was attained.

They told a story about the young generation, its spiritual character, its moral yearnings. They served as models not in the sense of choosing a profession, but in the sense of choosing a style and a way of life.¹⁹⁰

Many of the show's contests, which featured such tasks as matching accessories to a dress, were about the larger, political choices that such minor questions of taste represented.

The choices facing young, working class Soviet women were not limited to their own profession and personal style, however. In a structure that exemplified the "double burden" faced by Soviet women in the 1970s, the show was divided into two parts, one focused on professional skill and the other focused on skills related to women's roles in the home. Each show featured contestants from a single profession or a set of related ones (such as bakers and candy makers). In the show's first half, contestants with particular specialties competed in professional contests specific to their fields for the right to represent their factory or brigade. These contests were filmed separately, on location in each factory, and the outcomes were determined by a jury of factory officials and Youth Desk staff in advance of the show; much preparatory work, nomination, and auditioning took place off camera as well.¹⁹¹ Footage of the professional contests—bakers shaping decorative loaves in three minutes or television technicians assembling a TV in five—was shown and the outcomes were summarized at the beginning of each broadcast, as a prelude to the arrival on stage of eight semi-finalists selected during these preliminary, professional rounds.

In the second half of the show, these semi-finalists competed in contests that tested their knowledge and talent in a range of consumer and housekeeping roles. Some tested knowledge of household technology, as in a contest where confetti was released from the studio ceiling onto eight carpeted paths, and the contestants were given vacuum

¹⁸⁷ "Voprosy esteticheskogo vospitaniia v peredachakh glavnii redaktsii programm dlia molodezhi i glavoi redaktsii programm dlia detei tsentral'nogo televideniia (June 1973)," GARF f. 6903, op. 32, d. 253, l. 61.

¹⁸⁸ Men'shikov, "Za kadrom."

¹⁸⁹ Reid, "Cold War in the Kitchen," 214.

¹⁹⁰ Vasinskii, 49.

¹⁹¹ For descriptions of the production of several broadcasts of the show, see Men'shikov, "Za kadrom."

cleaners and told to clean their carpet as quickly and thoroughly as possible.¹⁹² The connection to the contestants' roles in the home was obvious, but, in introducing the contest, the program's host, the Youth Desk director Kira Proshutinskaia, made it explicit.¹⁹³ "Dear girls," she began, "many of you are already good housewives [*khozaiki*], and several of you will become them in the immediate future." The contest, she continued, was intended to reveal "how ready future housewives are for their encounter with household technology."¹⁹⁴ The show also focused, like *Auction*, on promoting consumer knowledge and good housekeeping. Sometimes the audience was engaged quite actively, as was the case in a salad-making contest in which the contestants presented recipes for a salad called "youth" that they had been asked to create. Viewers were urged to jot down the recipes and prepare them themselves in order to assess the women's efforts.¹⁹⁵ The show's competitions also focused on taste, and offered contestants and viewers opportunities for consumer fantasy. In one show, contestants were asked to furnish an entire apartment in a tasteful modern style.¹⁹⁶ The only contest that was known in advance by contestants was the dance contest, in which the women danced alone or with partners from the studio audience, using moves that were sometimes modern and bouncy, but stayed within the shifting boundaries set by the censors.¹⁹⁷

As these contests suggest, the modern Soviet girl presented on *Let's Go, Girls!* was obliged, like her counterparts elsewhere, to combine a number of conflicting identities. Were the contestants well-rounded career women, scientific housewives, or just pretty young things with good taste in clothes and furniture? The show was specifically aimed at less-educated Soviet young women, and proposed a restricted sphere for their self-expression, one limited to lower status jobs, the home and the family. But the show's contestants were selected by their factories' Komsomol committees, and some of the winners went on to rise quite high in the Party hierarchy.¹⁹⁸ The importance of the young women as Cold War role models also raised the problem of the show's lack of focus on their intellectual and cultural superiority. After the show's first year, it began to receive complaints that it failed to emphasize the women's intellectual capacities.¹⁹⁹ In the show's early seasons, these qualities were tested only in the context of being a fitting mother of Soviet children: in one contest, kindergartners were brought on stage to pepper each contestant with childish but scientific questions like "who turns on the moon," and "why don't you have to pour gasoline into a horse?" The women were judged on the clarity of their answers.²⁰⁰ As soon as the show began to feature contests that tested

¹⁹² "A nu-ka devushki ot 21 Fev. 1970 g." GARF f. 6903, op. 26, d. 1193, efirnaia papka 1039.

¹⁹³ Proshutinskaia hosted the show until 1975; from 1975 it was hosted by Aleksander Masliakov, the host of *KVN* and *Hello! We're Looking for Talents*.

¹⁹⁴ "A nu-ka, devushki!, 21 February 1970," GARF f. 6903, op. 26, d. 1193, efirnaia papka 1039.

¹⁹⁵ "A nu-ka, devushki!, 16 March 1970," GARF f. 6903, op. 26, d. 1193.

¹⁹⁶ "A nu-ka, devushki!, 28 December 1971," GARF f. 6903, op. 26, d. 1358.

¹⁹⁷ On the dance contest see "A nu-ka, devushki!," *Sovetskoe radio i televideenie* No. 6 (June 1970), 23.

¹⁹⁸ "O propagande sistemy professional'no-tehnicheskogo obrazovaniia v glavnoi redaktsii programm dlia molodezhi TsT." GARF f. 6903, op. 32, d. 781, l. 63.

¹⁹⁹ "Obzor pisem telezritelei za 1972 g." GARF f. 6903, op. 36, d. 2, l. 64. This report noted many requests for a wider range of questions, and quoted one collective letter that said "give them more questions about literature, art, and science. After all, girls now need a lot of knowledge, and not only about housekeeping."

²⁰⁰ "A nu-ka, devushki!," *Sovetskoe radio i televideenie* No. 6 (June 1970), 23.

knowledge of science and high culture in more abstract settings, requiring them to recite a passage from Pushkin, for example, or identify musical passages from the works of famous Russian composers, viewers complained that it was painful to watch these less educated young women struggle.²⁰¹ At the same time, viewers criticized the show for undermining its propagandistic message with contests that were too silly and unserious. A group of viewers from the Tatar ASSR complained that a contest in which women from Soviet poultry farms had been asked to stuff and sew down pillows, was “an example of how you shouldn’t work. Feathers and down were flying everywhere...and as for the pillows, feathers were coming out of the seams...Although television contests are supposed to be entertaining, they should not have a disrespectful relationship to labor.”²⁰² This was pillow fight, not high-quality pillow production.

Despite these tensions, *Let’s Go, Girls!* was a great success with the audience that mattered most, the Central Committee.²⁰³ Accustomed to criticism and repercussions from Central Television’s leadership and the Central Committee, the Youth Programming Desk enjoyed a very different response to this program, one that opened up greater resources for the show. The show began to feature elaborate costumes and sets and broadcast from remote locations in Moscow and eventually other cities and towns.²⁰⁴ Andrei Men’shikov, the *KVN* captain who came to work for the Youth Programming Desk in the 1970s remembered an episode broadcast from a village that included the construction of a model village, rowboats, and aerial shots from a helicopter provided by local officials.²⁰⁵ *Let’s Go, Girls!* was also enthusiastically greeted by many television viewers, who wrote in to describe the pleasure it had given them, or to say, in the case of younger viewers, that it had helped them choose a profession.²⁰⁶ Although viewer letters to the show dropped off after its first season, it continued to receive at least ten thousand letters a year through the mid-1970s, far more than other shows that did not offer viewers a chance to win prizes for writing in.²⁰⁷

Viewers wrote in to *Let’s Go, Girls!* for another reason: the show was the first Soviet game show in which winners were directly determined by viewers. In fact, the show’s light tone and limited focus on women’s work, consumption, and home probably made possible its open use of viewer voting. The professional contests in the first half of the show, as mentioned above, were judged by a jury before the broadcast, which

²⁰¹ “Obzor pisem telezritelei 1973 g.” GARF f. 6903, op. 36, d. 27, l. 82.

²⁰² Ibid., l. 81.

²⁰³ Men’shikov, “Za kadrom.”

²⁰⁴ The show was shot from locations in Moscow very early on, including an episode set at VDNKh in 1972. See “A nu-ka, devushki!” 7 March 1972, GARF f. 6903, op. 34, d. 53. By the mid-1970s it was broadcasting from more remote villages outside Moscow, as in the case of one broadcast described by Men’shikov in “Za kadrom.”

²⁰⁵ Men’shikov, “Za kadrom.”

²⁰⁶ Although it is difficult to judge the show’s overall popularity given the limits on Soviet audience research, the show seems to have been somewhat less popular than *KVN* or *Hello! We’re Looking for Talents* in the early 1970s. One 1972 survey found that roughly 60% of viewers reported watching *Let’s Go, Girls!*, vs. over 80% for *KVN* and *Hello!* “Subbotnie i voskresnye peredachi 1-oi programmy tsentral’nogo televideiniia (Analiz printsipov programmirovaniia i issledovaniie auditorii),” GARF f. 6903, op. 48, d. 115, l. 14-32.

²⁰⁷ After receiving just over 100,000 letters in 1970, the show received just over 10,000 in 1972; just under 20,000 in 1973, just over 10,000 in 1976. See letter reports in GARF f. 6903, op. 36.

featured only the eight finalists who emerged from those preliminary rounds. The show's second half, which featured non-professional contests in the studio, also had a jury that awarded points for each event; these points were tallied to select three finalists. These finalists, however, were presented to viewers at home, who were invited, at the end of the show, to write to the Youth Desk to "vote" for one of the contestants.²⁰⁸ At the beginning of the show's next broadcast, the victorious young woman was announced, with quotes from viewer letters in support of each candidate and, in early scripts for the show at least, the number of votes received by each contestant.²⁰⁹ There was then an elaborate crowning ceremony, complete with a three-level "pedestal of honor" similar to the podium for an Olympic medal ceremony. The highest pedestal was in the shape of a "throne" for the winner, who was crowned with a tiara and given a moiré sash with her title, for example, "Queen of the communications workers [*koroleva sviazistov*]."²¹⁰ In the 1970 season there was a championship broadcast in which winners of previous broadcasts competed with each other for the title "Queen of Youth [*Koroleva molodosti*]."²¹¹

Of course, as with previous game shows and musical programs that incorporated studio audience or viewer voting, there were clear limits on the audience's role in selecting a winner. The juries determined the finalists (and were subject to the familiar criticism from viewers for what the latter perceived to be arbitrary or unfair decisions). As in the New Year's musical contest *Song of the Year*, the award ceremony on *Let's Go, Girls!* made much of the wonderful performance of *all* of the finalists, suggesting that, really, there were no losers. It is unclear whether viewer votes really determined the winner at all. An early script included fake names like "Dusia Musina" and fantasy vote totals that imagined the show receiving over a million letters for a single episode, suggesting that the show's authors were awaiting the determination of victors after letters were tallied.²¹² But Men'shikov recalled filming one coronation ceremony the day after the contest itself, suggesting that viewer votes were not actually taken into account, at least in later years.²¹³

In some sense, however, it did not matter whether or not viewer votes were really counted on *Let's Go, Girls!* or other contest programs in the 1970s. The basic forms of voting and vote-counting, for multiple candidates with non-unanimous outcomes, were staged for all to see. Even the game show jury, with its opaque decision-making process and infrequent scoring updates, offered an alternative to the political model that reigned outside the television studio simply because it could be criticized directly for its unfairness and lack of transparency, and the show's producers felt they should respond. Other fields of Soviet cultural life, especially sport, provided alternative "rules of the game," or mirrored the real conflicts, unpredictability, and unfair play of Soviet political life. Game shows were unique, however, in the explicitness of their symbolic connection

²⁰⁸ "A nu-ka, devushki! 21 February 1970," GARF f. 6903, op. 26, d. 1193, efirnaia papka 1039.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Footage of pre-1985 broadcasts of the show seems not to have survived in the Gosteleradiofond archive. Description of this ceremony is based on the script, which, although signed by the Glavlit censors without edits, might not have been carried out exactly as written. See "A nu-ka devushki ot 21 fev. 1970 g." GARF f. 6903, op. 26, d. 1193, efirnaia papka 1039.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Men'shikov, "Za kadrom."

to Soviet life, and particularly to the complex of Cold War concerns about Soviet youth.

Conclusions

Soviet game shows could be many things to many audiences. The game shows described here delighted fans and bored them, generated outrage and exemplified Soviet values. The shift from *VVV* and *KVN* to *Auction* and *Let's Go, Girls!* can be read as a story of repression and decline, from thaw intelligentsia optimism to consumer triviality. It can just as easily be read as a story of resilience and perserverence, as a small group of producers in the Youth Programming Desk continued to make shows that were fun and innovative, to practice forms of live reporting and camera work after live broadcasting was abandoned, and to see themselves as “constructors of play,” experimenting with new forms to unite and transform the television audience. Both stories are true.

If we focus on the forms these game shows took, and the ways they addressed the task of dramatizing play and authority, however, a third story emerges, the one this chapter has traced. Throughout the 1960s and 70s, Soviet game shows sought to gather the largest possible audiences to both entertain and enlighten them. Their central concerns were taste, consumption, and youth identities, whether intellectual youth, whose Cold War superiority was measured in intellect and wit, or working class youth, whose loyal Soviet identities were assembled out of family and consumer choices and economic productivity. Yet despite these relatively stable objectives over the course of the post-Stalin period, these game shows, like the musical programs discussed in the previous chapter, suggest that, paradoxically, more formal innovation was possible after 1968. The conversations about rules, judging, authority, and access to scarce opportunities that sprang up around Central Television game shows in the 1960s became, in the 1970s, experiments with viewer voting, audience contests, and other forms of on-air feedback that brought the conflicts within the television audience and between the audience, Central Television, and television's censors onto center stage.

This happened for a number of reasons. Engaging audiences as directly as possible in articulating norms of behavior and consumption became more important after 1968. *Both* the heightening of Cold War tensions after the invasion of Czechoslovakia *and* their lessening during détente served to increase the importance of popular music and consumer lifestyles as arenas of Cold War competition. Shows that employed viewer voting and audience contests elicited large, measurable responses from viewers. This pleased both Central Television staff, who had always wanted to make popular programs, and their leadership: despite the crackdown on these shows' content in 1968-70, Central Television staff were repeatedly encouraged to seek new, lively, effective forms that would engage viewers as participants.

More broadly, as I argue in the introduction to this dissertation, the new political and ideological environment after 1968 contributed to a more expansive search for new ways of representing and unifying the Soviet public. In light of the widespread abandonment of faith in much of Marxist-Leninist eschatology and the Brezhnev regime's greatly reduced emphasis on the communist future in favor of the present state of “developed socialism,” enthusiasm for the Soviet project, conceived as the construction of communism, could no longer be assumed to be a shared characteristic of the Soviet people. Instead, Central Television staff began to focus on the areas of Soviet life that had always been a key subject for game shows: the values, forms of

consumption, and identities of a “Soviet way of life.” With this more limited subject matter, Central Television staff were freer to make audience response a central part of the shows’ formats, to acknowledge conflicts of taste and dramatize their resolution.

Yet there remained a sense, after the cancelation of *KVN*, that there was something missing that *Let’s Go, Girls!* could not provide. Where, after all, were the guys? In January, 1972, after many viewer letters requesting an equivalent of *Let’s Go, Girls!* for male youth, the Youth Programming Desk aired a new show called *Let’s Go, Guys! [A nu-ka, parni!]*, written and directed by Vladimir Voroshilov, the creator of *Auction*, and hosted by *Auction*’s former announcer, Anatoli Lysenko.²¹⁴ Despite the roguish air that Voroshilov brought to all of his work, however, *Let’s Go, Guys!* presented working class male youth in an equally restrictive set of roles. The show’s objective was to promote “applied” forms of sport, those with the greatest relevance to military service, and encourage young men to join local military-sport organizations and meet the state’s physical fitness standards.²¹⁵ Its subjects did not propose administrative reforms or answer quiz questions, they raced on motorcycles and shot at things.²¹⁶ They were judged by a jury made up of sports officials and high-ranking military officers, whose stern demeanor presented a problem—unlike the jury on *KVN*, the *Let’s Go, Guys!* jury had a hierarchical and awkward, not merry and casual, relationship to the contestants. The show’s producers had a hard time getting the officers to converse with the contestants on camera in an unstilted way.²¹⁷ Although *Let’s Go, Guys!* was popular with precisely the audience it at which it was aimed—non-elite young male viewers who were considered, within Central Television, to be the audience most difficult to reach—it was canceled in less than two years. Like Voroshilov’s previous game show, *Auction*, its demise was the result of a song, this time by a Bulgarian singer.²¹⁸

Let’s Go, Guys! was followed by other shows featuring working class young men racing cars and competing athletically. But throughout the 1970s Youth Desk staff bemoaned the absence of a program like *KVN* that focused on elite, intellectual youth. They also received complaints from viewers “month after month” asking them to “bring back *KVN*,” since “not one of the Youth Desk’s entertaining-educational programs [*razvlekatel’no-poznavatel’nye peredachi*] contains the positive qualities that

²¹⁴ “Obzor pisem telezritelei za 1972 g.” GASF f. 6903, op. 36, d. 2, l. 65.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ One early script included a brief overview of the show’s content (directed to the censor reading the script), describing four kinds of contests: 1) questions on the “rights and obligations of young men—the RSFSR law code on marriage and family, 2) Sambo (a Russian hand-to-hand combat sport), 3) weightlifting and 4) motorcycle duels. Interspersed with these contests would be interviews with the contestants, focusing on their roles “in production and in the domestic setting.” “A nu-ka parni! 4 March 1972,” GASF f. 6903, op. 34, d. 53, efirnaya papka 436.

²¹⁷ Youth Programming Editor Margarita Eskina criticized this aspect of the show in a Komsomol meeting in February, 1973. See “Stenogramma sektsii rabotnikov televideniiia, radio, teatra, kino,” RGASPI-m f. 1, op. 34, d. 685, l. 33-34. The show also included viewer voting, but in a separate contest called the “Viewer’s choice tournament” [*kubok zritelskikh simpatii*].

²¹⁸ See “Protokol #11 Sovmestnogo zasedaniia partinogo biuro i redsoveta ot 28 marta 1973 goda. “O programme “A nu-ka, parni!” i kontsertnykh nomerakh vkliuchennykh v programme.”” TsAOPIM f. 2930, op. 2, d. 447, l. 104. *Auktsion* had been canceled for similar reasons, but in this case editors foresaw that the Bulgarian singer would not meet the censors standards, but were unable to cut her act because of the involvement of the Bulgarian embassy in arranging her appearance.

characterized the former *Club of the Merry and Resourceful*.²¹⁹ At a 1977 meeting for Party members in the Youth Desk, one staff member reminded his colleagues that when *KVN* was canceled “we abandoned an important form of work.” “Creating a program that would be the equivalent of *KVN* has not gone off the agenda,” he told them. “Viewers still mourn this program.” But, he sensed a mood of hopelessness among his colleagues. “I sense a kind of inertia...a tired feeling that it is objectively impossible to create that kind of program. We have to overcome that,” he urged.²²⁰

In fact, although it was not an “equivalent of *KVN*,” in 1977 the Youth Desk did have a new game show that featured intellectual youth. Entitled *What? Where? When? [Chto? Gde? Kogda?]*, the new show was also created by the irrepressible Voroshilov, who saw it in terms quite similar to those of *KVN*: as a place where elite students and television viewers alike could come to test their knowledge, wits, and wherewithal in a form of play that mirrored real life. Yet *What? Where? When?* also reflected the significant changes in the ideological and political environment since *KVN*’s creation in the early 1960s. In addition to showcasing the talents of elite Soviet students, *What? Where? When?* involved both contestants and the television audience in a game that prepared them for battle in the increasingly corrupt and unpredictable world of Soviet life in the late 1970s and early 1980s.²²¹

²¹⁹ “Obzor pisem telezritelei za 1978 g.” GARF f. 6903, op. 36, d. 79, l. 55.

²²⁰ “Protokol #5 otkrytogo partiinogo sobraniia Glavnoi redaktsii programm dlia molodezhi ot 27 aprelia 1977g. Doklad on “Perspektivy molodezhnogo veshchaniia v 1978 g. i voprosy perestroiki raboty redaktsii,”” Ibid. l. 17-18.

²²¹ Vladimir Voroshilov, *Fenomen igry* (Moscow: Bibliotekha khudozhestvennyi samodeiatel’nosti, 1982). Electronic version of the relevant section at <http://znatoki.kulichki.net/dz/mats/fen15.html>.

Epilogue: *What? Where? When?*

Television is often mentioned as a central part of the experience of living through *perestroika*. People remember how the streets were empty during the political discussion programs *Twelfth story* [*12-i etazh*] or *Viewpoint* [*Vzgliad*], or during the live broadcast of the 27th Party Congress. The ways that Central Television changed during *perestroika* were distinct, however, from the ways that the print media changed: in fact, television lagged behind the press as a source for accurate information and particularly revelations about state crimes.¹ The most famous Gorbachev-era TV shows and broadcasts had another focus, one that was mainly oriented toward the future, rather than the past: the exchange of conflicting viewpoints on a series of new, political discussion-oriented programs and international debates.² These shows, and the fresh, direct journalistic language their hosts employed, were television's special contribution to the opening up of the Soviet media.³

In his influential recent book, *Everything was Forever Until it Was No More: the Last Soviet Generation*, Alexei Yurchak describes these *perestroika*-era television shows as the product of a “sudden rupture” in the discursive regime of late socialism.⁴ This rupture, Yurchak contends, began in 1985, when Gorbachev broke with the conventional, circular logic of high-level Party speeches and proposed that the question of how to improve the country’s situation, and the reasons that current efforts to improve it were failing, should be addressed to “economic managers,” “various specialists,” and “ordinary citizens.”⁵ Yurchak argues that this change in Gorbachev’s early speeches, “reintroduced into the narrative structure of authoritative discourse the voice of an external commentator or editor of ideology” who could criticize Soviet ideological discourse from expertise grounded outside it.⁶ The outcome of this break, Yurchak continues, was the deconstruction of Soviet ideological discourse, in the first three or four years of *perestroika*, in which “hyperformalized” ideological texts and visual media “suddenly” began to be publicly criticized precisely for being hyperformalized. For Yurchak, the most important evidence of this rupture was, first, the appearance of a “metadiscursive voice” in the media that attacked formulaic language and images as ineffective at reaching audiences, and, second, a new set of instructions to local Party and Komsomol officials in 1986, which ordered them to stop using formulaic language in

¹ See for example Vera Zvereva, “Poetika sotsial’nogo na TV. 1990 god,” *Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie* No. 83, <http://www.nlobooks.ru/rus/magazines/nlo/196/329/358/>

² Ellen Mickiewicz has the authoritative account of these shows, including extensive excerpts of the shows and interviews with the journalist Vladimir Pozner, in *Split Signals: Television and Politics in the Soviet Union* (Oxford University Press, 1988), 34-60.

³ Victoria Bonnell and Gregory Freidin have argued that television journalists using this fresh, direct language played a key role in the failure of the August, 1991 attempted coup against Gorbachev. See Bonnell and Freidin, “Televorot: the role of television coverage in Russia’s August 1991 Coup,” in *Soviet Hieroglyphics: Visual Culture in Late 20th Century Russia*, Ed. Nancy Condee, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

⁴ Alexei Yurchak, *Everything was Forever Until it Was No More: the Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 291.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

their speeches and instead to seek out new “fresh” [*svezhie*] terms, provide “real self-criticism,” admit “real problems,” and propose “a new, unfamiliar, creative approach [*tvorcheskii podkhod*] to solving them.⁷

Yet the idea that the appearance of this critical metadiscourse about formalized ideological language constituted a sharp break raises some problems. Where, after all, did this critical metadiscourse and its rather elaborate and fully realized reflections on several new television political discussion programs come from? Yurchak’s focus on everyday life and “normal people” makes this rather difficult to answer.⁸

This dissertation has tried to show that for the people who made the famous television political discussion programs of the second half of the 1980s, the “sudden” appearance of a public, critical metadiscourse about Soviet ideological language was not very sudden at all: Central Television’s more ambitious writers and editors had been struggling with the problem of formalized ideological language and visual stereotypes (a problem recognized by both Central Television’s highest leadership and many of its viewers) for at least two decades. Gorbachev’s instructions to Party officials to the search for “fresh” terms and “creative approaches” were likewise nothing new for Central Television staff; similar calls had been made in Central Television’s Party and staff meetings throughout the 1970s. These calls had, moreover, not gone unheard. Under pressure from the perceived need to counteract Western Cold War propaganda, particularly foreign radio broadcasting, Central Television staff sought to reach and engage Soviet citizens with entertaining programs that could compete with foreign radio news and musical programs and that conveyed state messages about the superiority of the Soviet way of life. They opened up politically crucial questions of musical taste, consumption, and youth identity to ordinary citizens. There were, as we have seen, important limits on Central Television’s ability to experiment with new forms and styles for delivering state messages. Domestic news programs, for example, were prevented from employing the kinds of open-ended narratives, fresh journalistic voices, and visual styles that were permissible, paradoxically, for Soviet coverage of foreign news. But in fields that were less closely controlled much more experimentation was possible. The musical holiday programs and game shows I have discussed in this dissertation became the site of novel representations of Soviet society and experiments with public decision-making that did not refer to the Party’s leading role.

Some of these shows, including the one I would like to conclude with in this epilogue, had much in common with Yurchak’s brilliantly documented “deterritorialized milieus.”⁹ They were playful, creative, indeterminate, and open-ended; they were facilitated by the Soviet state’s contradictory encouragement of both obedience to the Party and critical thinking, innovation, and self-development; and they became a

⁷ Yurchak, 292-293.

⁸ Benjamin Nathans and Kevin Platt have observed, in a recent essay on Yurchak’s book, that the collapse of the Soviet Union had been predicted by some members of the dissident movement as early as 1964, and thus was not completely unexpected, as Yurchak contends. They also point out that the fact that few foresaw the collapse of the Soviet Union is typical, rather than exceptional: revolutionary social change is rarely anticipated by contemporaries. See Nathans and Platt, “*Sotsialisticheskaiia po forme, neopredelennaia po soderzhaniiu: pozdnesovetskaia kul’tura i kniga Alekseia Iurchaka Vse bylo navechno, poka ne konchilos’*,” N. Movnina, trans. *Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie*, No. 101 (January, 2010), <http://magazines.russ.ru/nlo/2010/101/ke12.html>.

⁹ Yurchak, 126-157.

ubiquitous part of everyday life for most people. Yet they also suggest the extent to which these milieus may not all have been as clearly set apart from Soviet political life as Yurchak suggests.¹⁰ Rather, they were explicitly propagandistic in their aims, but at the same time proposed forms of politics that were marginal to or clearly outside Soviet political culture. These shows in particular, and one of the editorial desks that produced them, offer us a clearer picture of the origins of the particular forms that Gorbachev's *perestroika* took on Central Television.

For Eduard Sagalaev, one of the key figures inside Central Television during *perestroika*, the story of *perestroika*-era television discussion programs had begun much earlier, in the late 1970s, in the Youth Programming Desk [*Glavnaia redaktsiia programm dlia molodezhi*].¹¹ Sagalaev arrived in the Youth Desk in 1975 and went on to create the famous *perestroika* political discussion programs *Twelfth Floor* [12-i etazh], *Viewpoint* [Vzgliad], and *Seven Days* [Sem' Dnei], to serve as the Chief Editor of the News Desk from 1988 to 1990, and to found and lead the first private Russian television channel, TV-6, in 1992. In an interview in 2006, Sagalaev drew a direct connection between the political discussion shows he worked on in the late 1980s and another show he had overseen since its first broadcast in 1975: a game show, created by Vladimir Voroshilov, and entitled *What? Where? When?* [Chto? Gde? Kogda?].¹² According to Sagalaev, "*What? Where? When?* taught [people] how to think and how to argue... people would start yelling in the studio...it was live discussion [*zhivoe obshchenie*]."¹³

What? Where? When? began as a family quiz show similar to the American show *Family Feud*. After a few years of experimentation and very irregular broadcasts, however, the show found what would remain its basic structure and protagonists.¹⁴ From 1978, *What? Where? When?* pitted a team of six "whiz kids [*zнатоки*]," young, educated people from various fields of expertise, against the "team" of television viewers who submitted questions by mail and sought to stump the team of *zнатоки*. The questions were drawn from the natural sciences, non-Soviet history, literature, and the arts. Each had a factual answer, but was posed in a riddle-like form, to throw the *zнатоки* off track and

¹⁰ Nathans and Platt make a related argument, that Yurchak is wrong to draw a sharp distinction between his subjects and dissidents, and to accept at face value the former's claims that their way of life had no connection to either political life or dissidence. "Sotsialisticheskaiia po forme," <http://magazines.russ.ru/nlo/2010/101/ke12.html>.

¹¹ Eduard Sagalaev has described several programs that were given broader scope to include what he calls a "dukh vol'nosti..dukh svobodomyslii." In addition to another game show, called *You Can Do It* [*Eto vy mozhete* or *EVM*], there was a 1977 documentary film series *Nasha Biografia*. With one one-hour film per year of Soviet history, the series was an immense undertaking; it was also a remake of a 1967 series based on the same principle, called *Letopis' poluveka* and intended to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the October revolution. The 1977 version treated Stalin's "deviations" far more directly than its predecessor, and the Youth *redaktsiia* staff who created the episode dealing with 1937, including Sagalaev, were awarded the *Leninskaia premia* in recognition of their work. Eduard Sagalaev, interview with author, Moscow, 13 February 2007.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid. For more on the importance of *obshchenie* in late Soviet life see Aleksander Genis' and Peter Vail', *60-e. Mir Sovetskogo Cheloveka* (Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2001), 69; and Yurchak, 148-151.

¹⁴ Voroshilov continued, however, to tinker with the game's rules and format until his death in 2001. For a detailed account of each year's matches, see <http://chhgk.tvigra.ru/library/?30years>

leave room for “brainstorming” and debate.¹⁵ The game was divided into rounds, like a boxing match: at the beginning of each round a *zнаток* spun a roulette-like wheel to determine which of the numbered viewer letters laid out around the wheel the team would answer during that round. After Voroshilov, the show’s off-camera narrator, read the question aloud, the group of *zнатоки* had one minute (the show’s famous *minuta obsuzhdeniia* or “minute of debate”) to decide on a collective answer.

These rules brilliantly resolved many of the problems Soviet game shows had faced in the past, including the difficulty of the questions, the authority of judges, and the obligation to identify losers as well as winners. The show’s carefully selected and highly educated participants, working in teams of six, could handle questions difficult enough to be a credit to Soviet youth, a problem that had plagued previous game shows, from *VVV* to *Let’s Go, Girls!* Even better, the fact that the *zнатоки* were playing against television viewers meant that when they failed to answer a question correctly, there was no real blow to the image of the Soviet populace—after all, they had simply been stumped by Soviet citizens who were even smarter. Like the stilted “socialist competitions” between factories or towns, on *What? Where? When?* the Soviet people always won, but someone also really lost, making the show both ideologically acceptable and dramatic, conflictual, and exciting. The show’s questions, moreover, were difficult mainly as riddles—the factual knowledge on which they were based could be established as true quickly by referring to popular journals or encyclopedias.

As Voroshilov explained in a 1982 guide for amateur productions of the show, these rules made a jury unnecessary, established the fairness of the game among participants and viewers alike, and created conditions that maximized the freedom of the players to express themselves.¹⁶ Beyond this basic structure described above, however, Voroshilov saw the show’s rules as an arena for experimentation, a way to shape human behavior, and he frequently altered the way that correct or incorrect answers affected the individual players or the team as a whole.¹⁷ The show’s content, he explained, “was all in the rules, and only in them!

Adjust the rules a little bit, and as if by the wave of a magic wand, a sense of daring, bravery, rudeness, even recklessness [appears]. Change them again...and suddenly a collective united by a shared idea will be created.

Now change them again and again,” Voroshilov urged. “Everything is in your power. You are a dramaturg, a constructor [*konstruktor*], an architect. You are more than a director, much more!”¹⁸

What was all of this for? The show was described internally as propagandizing not only the superior intellectual qualities of Soviet youth and self-development along those lines, but also teamwork and negotiation.¹⁹ Voroshilov’s return to Central

¹⁵ “Razgovory na khodu s Nataliei Stetsenko” in A. Korin, *Fenomen “Chto? Gde? Kogda?”* (Moscow: Eksmo Press, 2002), 33.

¹⁶ Vladimir Voroshilov, *Fenomen igry* (Moscow: Bibliotekha khudozhestvennyi samodeiatel’nosti, 1982). Electronic version of the relevant section at <http://zнатоки.kulichki.net/dz/mats/fen15.html>.

¹⁷ For a detailed account of each year’s rules and matches, see <http://chgrk.tvigra.ru/library/?30years>

¹⁸ Voroshilov, *Fenomen igry*, <http://chgrk.tvigra.ru/library/?fenomen/14#cur>

¹⁹ Interview with Eduard Sagalaev, Moscow, 13 February 2007.

Television after the cancelation of *Let's Go, Guys!* in 1973 was part of a significant loosening of restrictions on the style and content of shows in the Musical and Youth Programming Desks that began in 1977-78, as part of an attempt to attract younger viewers. As Evgenii Petrovich Shirokov, the Chief Editor of the Youth Desk in 1977, observed, “rarely can you find the conflict of opinions, the spark of heated argument and of temper, the uninhibitedness of thought, which are characteristic of youth.” *What? Where? When?* was designed to “address that problem.”²⁰ But as Voroshilov made clear in his writings about the show, he had another set of purposes in mind: preparing Soviet individuals for life in an increasingly corrupt and unpredictable world.

Voroshilov stressed that the skill the game tested was not mere erudition, but something much grander. Rather than focusing on narrow factual knowledge, in which a person with some specific education would have an advantage, the questions should be

designed for...a typical person ‘from the crowd’. The questions...should help such a person believe in his or her strengths, convince him or her that, with a minimum of fundamental knowledge, he or she can...solve any problem that life might place before him.²¹

Moreover, *What? Where? When?* would test *all* of a player’s capacities and talents simultaneously, rather than being a series of separate contests of particular abilities, as had been the case on *Let's Go, Girls!/Guys!* For Voroshilov, this made the show a good fit for the circumstances of life in the early 1980s, when corruption and political intrigue were growing rapidly.²² Writing in 1982, Voroshilov observed that “professional games [*delovye igry*]” were gaining importance and life itself required the utmost skill and readiness for conflict.

How can a person learn to react instantly to one or another unexpected situation that might arise? How can he learn to keep all of his senses and abilities ready for battle and immediately put them to work? How, after all, can he objectively evaluate himself, his abilities, his strong and weak sides, confirm what he’s really able to do? The process of developing, of opening up in a person these necessary life qualities is, in my opinion, the highest objective of any important game.²³

For these reasons, Voroshilov argued, the show was to mirror real life as closely as possible, so that it might serve as a “dress rehearsal” [*general’naia repetitsiia*] for life itself.²⁴

Conceived entirely from the perspective of the Soviet individual, pursuing personal goals in a hostile environment, the version of Soviet life that Voroshilov imagined on *What? Where? When?* looked very different from the one described on *Time* every evening. It was also set in a world that seemed apart from Soviet life, as that life

²⁰ “Stenogramma otchetnoi partiinoi konferentsii,” December 22, 1977. TsAOPIM f. 2930, op. 3, d. 223, l. 61.

²¹ Voroshilov, *Fenomen igry*, <http://chgrk.tvigra.ru/library/?fenomen/14#cur>

²² Moshe Lewin, *The Soviet Century*, Ed. Gregory Elliott (New York: Verso, 2005), 261.

²³ Voroshilov, *Fenomen igry*, <http://chgrk.tvigra.ru/library/?fenomen/14#cur>.

²⁴ Ibid.

was construed in Soviet ideology.²⁵ The program was shot not in a theater or a stadium, like all previous Soviet game shows, but in the bar of the Ostankino television center. In 1983, it moved to a crumbling former palace on Herzen Street.²⁶ In each of these places, the set managed to evoke both a Western capitalist world and a pre-revolutionary Russian one, not least because the show's set resembled a casino more than anything else. The *zнатоки* were gathered around a roulette wheel like players at a high stakes table, with members of other teams, TV staff, and a small audience pushing closer to watch the action. The room was dim and featured, from the 1979 season onward, live jazz and musical interludes by popular groups, including the Soviet rock group *Time Machine* [*Mashina Vremeni*] in 1982.²⁷

Voroshilov also did his best to glamorize the show's very modest prizes—books, usually attractive bound editions of pre-Revolutionary literature or science fiction that were difficult to obtain in stores but nonetheless fully in accordance with the norms of a Soviet game show.²⁸ Unlike *Let's Go, Girls!* or *Auction*, however, there were no poorly motivated giveaways of large household items, and no consolation prizes for the losers: prizes were for winners only and their awarding was celebrated in great detail. Small non-book prizes, including memorabilia from the show, were introduced in 1985, but even before then Voroshilov did all he could to focus on the prizes and the process of awarding them—in the 1984 final match the winning *zнаток* or television viewer was paraded by several festively costumed musicians down a long path to a glittering New Year's tree hung with books, from which he or she carefully chose, captured by extended close-ups of both the books and the winner's face as he or she made a selection.

The show's atmosphere and setting were, in fact, not out of the ordinary on Soviet television in the late 1970s and early 1980s.²⁹ Neither was its emphasis on conflict, open-ended narratives, and heroes whose fate was uncertain: those elements were familiar from foreign news coverage and sports, which occupied an increasing share of the Soviet television schedule in the years before the 1980 Olympic Games, as well as from the many other forms of competition and testing that made up a large part of Soviet everyday life.

Yet, as with previous game shows, the show's theatricality and subject matter—not only knowledge but reason, argument, and decision-making—made its parallels with the political world more vivid. The show's central theme—the need for a new kind of

²⁵ The show was quite similar to Yurchak's "deterritorialized milieus" in this regard. See Yurchak, 126-157.

²⁶ Kseniia Larina, radio interview with Aleksandr' Druz' and Viktor Sidnev, *Ekho Moskvy*, aired March 23, 2003 11:10-12:00. Transcript available at <http://chgrk.tvigra.ru/library/?articles/echo05#cur>

²⁷ "Что? Где? Когда?—televizionnaia igra", http://www.tvmuseum.ru/catalog.asp?ob_no=6801. Voroshilov loved to include popular music on his programs; his first two programs for Central Television had both been canceled because of the appearance of singers whose style was too Westernized for television's censors. See Chapter 5 of this dissertation.

²⁸ According to Sagalaev, Voroshilov had always wanted the game to be played for money; Sagalaev, who saw Voroshilov as his mentor but was technically his boss and censor, had rejected this idea since he understood that it would mean cancellation. Interview with Eduard Sagalaev, Moscow, 13 February 2007

²⁹ Such settings abounded on Soviet television in the 1970s. For example, the wildly popular comedy serial *Kabachok* "13 Stul'ev" was set in a Polish bar and frequently featured estrada performances in Western European languages; the serial film *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* was set in a comfortingly distant, pre-Revolutionary milieu.

teamwork and a flexible leadership that would allow for individual contributions and recognize merit—reflected a crucial tension in post-Stalin Soviet life between the collective obligations of Soviet society and the problematic and limited space for individual pursuits and self-development that had been recognized under Khrushchev.³⁰ Like *KVN* before it, *What? Where? When?* drew very explicit parallels between its organization and that of the Soviet political world. Voroshilov's instructions for creating teams of *zнатоки* for local clubs indicate that the *zнатоки* were meant to exemplify intellectual and ethical values that stood in implicit contrast to Party officialdom: anyone prone to self-indulgent speechifying or longwinded shows of factual erudition was to be eliminated immediately. Since the *zнатоки* in this sense represented a sort of alternative elite, it is perhaps no coincidence that Voroshilov and his team prided themselves on the use of rigorous psychological testing and training in selecting the *zнатоки* and determining the captains of each team—a technique that resembles those used by elite military and police forces.³¹

At the same time, the game constantly staged the vulnerability of its players. In this world where elite position was earned by merit, no leader was for life. In 1983 it became possible for teams to remove members who were not playing well, or simply to swap players in and out depending on the team's needs. The team's captain or an unofficial leader within the group could also rise and fall, and Voroshilov used his position as the game's narrator to draw the viewers' attention to the captain's errors, such as the failure to listen to a quiet member who had given the correct answer but had been ignored. Voroshilov explained that although the questions were meant to level the playing field between individuals of different knowledge and experience, the game would naturally reveal a hierarchy among the players, identifying main characters and secondary ones, and, in effect, replicating the social world of the whole audience within the small group of *zнатоки*. Among the *zнатоки*, Voroshilov wrote, "jokers and braggarts, hard workers and lazy people, their characters will begin to be revealed right before our eyes. And among them a main hero, a leader, will appear without fail—we don't yet know exactly who he'll be, but he will absolutely appear." And, like in life or any good tragedy (but unlike in a socialist realist novel) that hero might fall:

Now here he is, this main hero. Will he last forever? Or is a plot reversal possible, in which the hero is subjected to new challenges and doesn't succeed? And what will then happen to the team? Will it find a new hero to replace him?³²

If individuals could rise and fall within the team of *zнатоки*, there was also the larger risk that the entire team could be defeated by the television viewers, and they occasionally were. The implications were at once entirely orthodox—of course the Soviet people could develop itself and surpass the small club of *zнатоки*—and potentially devastating, since the *zнатоки* easily stood in for another tiny vanguard opposed to the Soviet populace.³³ Voroshilov, both in private and openly as the show's invisible

³⁰ See Nathans and Platt, "Sotsialisticheskaja po forme," <http://magazines.russ.ru/nlo/2010/101/ke12.html>.

³¹ Interview with Sagalaev, Moscow, 13 February 2007.

³² Voroshilov, *Fenomen igry*, <http://chhgk.tvigra.ru/library/?fenomen/14#cur>.

³³ Interview with Sagalaev, Moscow, Feb 13, 2007. Sagalaev believes Voroshilov saw the *zнатоки* in exactly this way.

narrator, always rooted for the television viewers against the *zнатоки*.³⁴

When *perestroika* began to arrive on Soviet television, therefore, it seemed that *What? Where? When?* had been preparing for it all along. Voroshilov had always insisted that the show be shot all in one take to create the feeling of live broadcasting; from 1986 onward it was live.³⁵ Musical guests, who began performing in the palace on Herzen street in 1984, replacing the video clips of earlier years, were now performing live for the whole television audience.³⁶ After it was out-intrigued in 1986 by a Komsomol group that wanted to turn the palace on Herzen street into a cooperative restaurant, the show, which had always felt like it was not quite set in the Soviet Union, went abroad for three international matches in Bulgaria. When it returned to the Soviet Union in 1988, broadcasting from the *Sovintsentr* building, it brought international guests back with it—the 1988 and 1989 matches all featured teams from capitalist countries, including the United States and Sweden, as well as, in 1989, from cities around the USSR, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Bulgaria. The internationalization of the game both fit with the change in Soviet relations with the West under Gorbachev and prefigured the emigration of *What? Where? When?*, along with millions of former Soviet citizens, after 1991. Finally, Voroshilov could now realize his ambition of playing for something more than books: the 1987 matches in Bulgaria saw the introduction of valuable prizes, ranging from a set of six Soviet watches to perfume sets to decorative objects by Bulgarian and Soviet artists, each paraded at great length before the audience and the cameras and set out for the *zнатоки* to choose from each time they answered a question correctly.³⁷

Perhaps the most dramatic change, however, was in the nature of the questions. Since the show had never entirely been about the trivia its name implied, its heated debates and “brainstorms” now easily expanded to include questions that went beyond “what?”, “where?”, and “when?” to “who?”, “why?”, and “how?”. The show began to feature questions about the legal and social changes of Gorbachev’s reforms, and the “minute of debate” became the political roundtable it had always implicitly resembled. As a result, Voroshilov made substantial changes in the show’s format. In this new setting, the *zнатоки* came primarily to represent a positive alternative leadership or way of thinking, rather than an elite to be displaced by television viewers. Voroshilov began to make striking interventions to test the *zнатоки*’s political courage. In one dramatic moment during the 1987 Bulgarian matches, Voroshilov pressured a Bulgarian player into reversing his team’s “correct” answer—that factories themselves should decide how many pairs of pants and how many buttons to create in response to demand—and then criticized the player for his failure to stand up for his ideas.³⁸

The boundary between *zнатоки* and viewers also blurred considerably, most notably with the 1988 inclusion of amateur teams from other USSR cities and Eastern Europe in a format in which 10 teams from different places played together as an expanded team of *zнатоки*—fittingly, the motto of the 1988 season was “all for one and

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Korin, *Fenomen Chto? Gde? Kogda?*, 147.

³⁶ *Chto? Gde? Kogda? na 6-ti dvd diskakh. Legendarnye finaly, mezhdunarodnye igry 80-x.* DVD recording (Gosteleradiofond, 2006).

³⁷ The first non-book prizes were introduced in the 1985 final, but these were of low monetary value—a toy owl (the show’s mascot) and the famous top that spun the wheel, for example. Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

one for all.” In the much larger space the *Sovintsentr* offered, the game could now include not only formerly amateur teams that represented the participating audience, but an even larger viewer audience that crowded every passageway, and watched from the floor, on the same level, literally, as the *zнатоки*. This continued Voroshilov’s practice, begun in 1984, of moving the television audience onto the stage, alongside the *zнатоки* and subject to the same admiring treatment by the camera. Viewers who weren’t yet on stage were also encouraged to participate more directly, by calculating their “intellectual rating”—a number based on the number of questions correctly answered and those questions’ difficulty.

The 1988 matches fully realized the game’s potential as a forum for political debate that was open and competitive. The show featured new rules, whereby all the teams of *zнатоки* had the right to propose answers to the question after the answer given by the team at the main table, but only the final answer given by any team would stand as the answer for the entire club of *zнатоки*. These rules both maximized the number of opinions and arguments viewers would hear and emphasized the importance of exchange, consensus, and courage of conscience. Yet there were several cases during these matches where a single reactionary answer—if given last—had the power to defeat the entire team, even when the majority of players had given versions of a “correct” answer, one, that is, that supported reform. In this way, despite its exciting atmosphere of openness and discussion, the show revealed the limits of reasoned debate without a mechanism for resolving real conflicts.

What? Where? When? remained on the air during the 1990s, of course, and continued to change to reflect the larger society it sought to mirror. As the rules binding players in Russia’s economic and political game broke down and risks increased, Voroshilov began to call the show an “intellectual casino”—one of many casinos in the new Moscow landscape. Right away in 1991 the *zнатоки* began to play for money, as Voroshilov had always wanted. The elite status of the *zнатоки* became a new focus in a rapidly stratifying society: the *zнатоки* began to dress in tuxedos in 1994, and the “crystal owl”—an audience prize for the best *zнаток* of the year, initiated in 1985—was joined by the “diamond star” in 1995, and eventually, in 2002, became the “diamond owl,” which weighs in at more than eight kilograms of silver, crystals, and rubies.³⁹

The transformations of *What? Where? When?* from the late 1970s to the late 1990s are indicative of the paradoxical place of television, and many other state-produced mass media and entertainments, in late Soviet life. At the height of “stagnation” in the early 1980s, when the aging of the regime was made dramatically evident by a series of state funerals, *What? Where? When?* could put elite intellectual youth in a casino, engage them in vigorous roundtable debates, mirror a conflictual and unpredictable real world, and emphasize the need for individuals to develop themselves in order to thrive in that world, all while fitting relatively comfortably within the bounds of what was permissible on one of the most carefully censored media in the Soviet Union. The political intrigues taking place at the highest levels of the Soviet state, the abandonment of belief in the immediacy of the communist future, and the urgent need to engage young people with Soviet cultural products and values in light of the enormous popularity of Western

³⁹ For the history of the diamond owl and the players who have received it, see the website of the current Russian television company producing *Что? Где? Когда?* Prodiuserskii tsentr “Igra-TV”, <http://chgrk.tvigra.ru/encyclopedia/?nagrada2>

popular culture all combined to create a significant space for cultural play. By the late 1970s and early 80s, this play and experimentation was both extraordinarily independent from the tenets of Marxism-Leninism and extraordinarily open to interpretation, yet it was also highly politicized.

This dissertation has tried to explore the origins of this openness and experimentation, and to show how and why Central Television's writers, directors, and editors used the various models, forms, and languages available to them to create television shows that could easily make the transition to post-Soviet life, since they were already open-ended and not formally dependent on Marxism-Leninism. These traditions and models included the ideas of the revolutionary avant-garde in the visual arts, journalism, and theater, the pre-Revolutionary and NEP-era variety stage and folk carnivals, spectator sports, Jewish humor from Odessa, and television genres and styles borrowed from the West or from Eastern Europe, among others. The narrowing of the definition of "Sovietness" to a very few symbols, images, styles, and formulas that had taken place during the 1930s was broken open during the Thaw—there was a great deal of cultural matter of diverse origins swimming around in the primordial soup of the post-Stalin period, to borrow Katerina Clark's useful ecological model of cultural change.⁴⁰ In fact, of course, this narrowing process had never completely penetrated the world of popular or high culture. Still, the doors to earlier Soviet experiences and foreign cultural models were thrown wide during the Thaw, and, most crucially, consequences for crossing the line made far less severe.

Yet an ecological approach does not sufficiently address the question of agency. Central Television's producers might have stuck close to formulaic language and familiar imagery, and in fact a great deal of them did, since producing shows that met the censors' requirements and did not take any risks meant that television workers could receive the honoraria they were paid for each program that aired. Instead, Central Television directors, writers, and editors experimented with the variety of available cultural resources because of their own ambitions as aspiring members of the artistic intelligentsia, their desire to create programs that were popular and could rival the reach and power of other media and entertainments, and, sometimes, their genuine enthusiasm for a better socialist future.

Television staff were also, however, actively encouraged to innovate by Central Television's leadership and the Central Committee. Although the tastes of that leadership and the political environment in which they worked changed, Central Television's staff were constantly criticized for making boring programs and encouraged to be more creative within the limits of what was possible. Although there were consequences for risk-taking, there were also significant rewards, including prestige, larger salaries and production budgets, and, by the late 1970s, state prizes. As we saw in Chapter 2, the staff of the Propaganda Desk [*Glavnaiia redaktsiia propagandy*], which produced programming that focused directly on Marxism-Leninism, constantly complained that they could not get prime spots in the schedule for their shows.

This encouragement to experiment with novel genres and forms of contact with

⁴⁰ On this narrowing process in Soviet mass festivals, see Malte Rolf, "A Hall of Mirrors: Sovietizing Culture under Stalinism," *Slavic Review* 68, 3 (2009), 601-611. On the "ecology of revolution," see Katerina Clark, *Petersburg: Crucible of Cultural Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), ix, 11-16.

the television audience can be explained in several ways. Like all other spheres of Soviet popular culture, and indeed mass media in many other societies, Central Television's staff and leadership faced a tension between enlightenment and entertainment—the obligation to attract and retain viewers if they hoped to influence them. This tension, present throughout Soviet history, was exacerbated by the Cold War. As I have emphasized throughout, Central Television was at the center of Soviet Cold War competition with the West. Strongly associated with the consumer good life and the private home, television was seen as an essential medium for state messages about the superiority of Soviet life. Vibrant, engaging television entertainments were also a form of Cold War counterpropaganda in their own right, when so much of the West's appeal was based on imagery of consumer lifestyles and popular music. In this context, the boldest visions of television as a participatory, festive medium also offered the greatest hope that state messages could be made appealing and attractive enough to succeed in shaping viewers' beliefs and behaviors.

These same hopes extended to domestic economic production. Attempts to implement systemic economic reforms had failed by the late 1960s, making television, along with other cultural media, one of only a few remaining ways of shaping economic behavior without recourse to either coercion or meaningful material incentives. Encouraging individual workers to put forth a greater effort was the only way to increase productivity in the absence of systemic change. Lapin and other members of the Central Television leadership in the 1970s frequently referred to the connection between television's evening and weekend schedules and the "mood" of the working population: if workers were entertained and happy in the evenings, the thought went, they would carry that "good mood" with them into the workplace the following day. Central Television's staff were also encouraged to create inspiring portraits of model workers that would motivate viewers to emulate those workers' belief in the system and diligent work ethic. Since Central Television staff at all levels were highly aware that lengthy, formulaic portraits of model workers were boring and thus ineffective, they created new genres and forms that would attract viewers, including game shows but also serial films, courtroom dramas, and a program called *With All My Heart* [*Ot vsei dushi*], which was somewhere between a talk show and televangelism. Taken together, these programs reflected a surprisingly lively search, at the height of "stagnation," for new ways of uniting the citizens of an eternal state, without direct reference to the millenarian ideology that underlay that state's political order.

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Gosteleradiofond	(<i>Gosudarstvennyi fond televizionnykh i radioprogramm</i>)
TsMADSN	(<i>Tsentral'nyi Moskovskii Arkhiv Dokumentov na Spetsial'nykh Nositeliakh</i>)
RGANI	(<i>Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv noveishei istorii</i>)
RGASPI-m	(<i>Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii-m</i> , formerly <i>Tsentral'nyi Moskovskii Arkhiv Dokumentov na Spetsial'nykh Nositeliakh</i>)
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 Genrikash Iushkevichus, Moscow, February 2007

Television shows

12-ti etazh
Allo! my ishchem talanty
A nu-ka, devushki!
A nu-ka, parni!
Artloto
Auktsion
Chto? Gde? Kogda?
Estafeta novostei
EVM
Goluboi ogonek
Kinopanorama
Klub Kinoputeshestvennikov
KVN
Mezhdunarodnaia panorama
Molodye golosa
Ot vsei dushi
Pesnia goda
Segodnia v mire
Sem' dnei

*S pesnei po zhizni
Utrennaia pochta
V efire molodost'
Virazh
Vladyki bez maskov
Vremia
VVV
Vzgliad*

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